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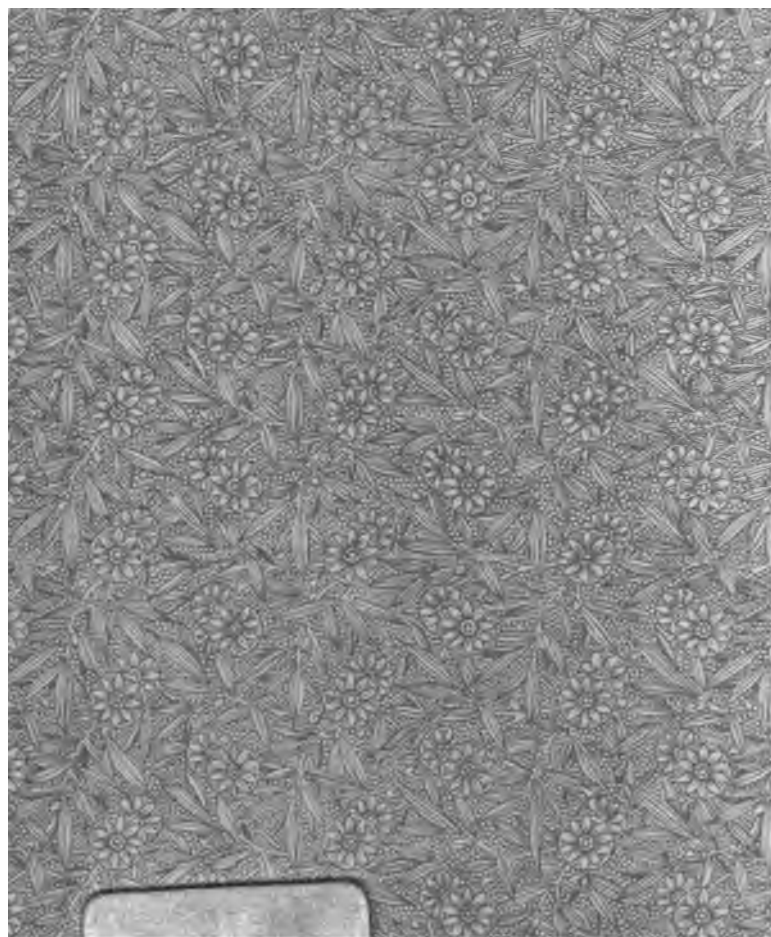
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FACING
THE FOOTLIGHTS

By
FLORENCE MARRYAT.



FACING THE FOOTLIGHTS.

A NOVEL.

BY

FLORENCE MARRYAT

(MRS FRANCIS LEAN),

AUTHOR OF "LOVE'S CONFLICT," "MY SISTER THE ACTRESS,"
"PHYLLIDA," ETC. ETC. ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

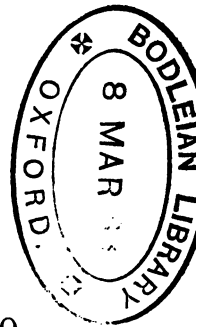
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FACING THE FOOTLIGHTS.



CHAPTER I.

A CHILD IN A PRISON.

“**W**HAT!” cried Eudora Thane, with open, wondering eyes. Yet even that objectionable syllable had no power to make her less charming. She was seated on the ground, in Mrs Gerome’s little parlour, clad in a common print dress, that showed every line of her rounded, supple figure. Her hat was thrown to one side; her ruddy hair lay in a tangled mass

and stained with gathering moss and flowers. Upon her lap she bore a purple cloud of violets, the fragrance of which seemed to rise and fall with every breath she drew; and through the open window came the scent of apple blossom and the bitter-sweet of hawthorn, with the sound of bleating lambs and twittering birds in the soft, balmy air of a May morning. Spring was around and about her, and spring was in her April face, and deep-tinted eyes, and fair, smooth skin; the spring of youth, and hope, and tranquil happiness. Mrs Gerome laughed to see her look of incredulous surprise.

“Having been brought up to the stage,” she re-commenced, “from the time that I was seven years old—”

Again Eudora interrupted her. She could not believe her ears, even for the second time.

“The stage!” she ejaculated. “Do you

mean that you have acted for money—in a real theatre?”

“I do, indeed, child, in a great many real theatres, and for a good deal of money, though not nearly so much as I could wish. But I thought all Holyoak was aware that I am an actress! Have you really never heard of it before?”

“Never,” murmured the girl; “and how could I guess—”

She did not finish the sentence, but her eyes roved round the little room, and out upon the sunny patch of garden, and finished it for her.

“How could you guess,” continued Mrs Gerome merrily, “that a professional actress, who has been used to the footlights and the orchestra all her life, could possibly take any interest in chickens and pansies, or consent to vegetate in Holyoak, with no better company than her maid and her dog? But that is just the charm of it, Eudora.”

"I am stupid," said the girl, "and I don't understand."

She was not stupid, far from it, but the news she had heard was so utterly unexpected that it confused her.

"My dear, I will explain it to you. I have been on the stage, with little intermission, for more than twenty years, and I have worn myself out by it, body and soul. So the doctors ordered me rest, and a complete change, and I took this queer little cottage and came down to recruit my health at Holyoak."

"It is so dull, so lonely here," said Eudora.

"It is just what I required. I wanted peace and solitude, and time for thought, and I had other reasons, into which you could not enter, for wishing to remain unknown and unsought after for a little while. And Hannah and I have enjoyed ourselves very much here for the last six months, combing the dog and renovat-

ing our somewhat dilapidated wardrobes. Hannah is an oddity, Eudora. I am the only person privileged to address her by her Christian name. To the rest of the world she is Mrs Squires, but she perfectly adores me. She thinks I am the handsomest and cleverest woman on the face of the earth. She would be ready to knock any one down who assailed either my character or my person—and she proves her admiration by copying me as closely as she possibly can, in everything that I do, say, or wear.”

Eudora laughed.

“I have noticed that,” she said, “Mrs Squires imitates even your way of speaking, and her last bonnet had exactly the same trimming as yours.”

“Quite true, my dear! Her devotion has its drawbacks, but the advantages out-balance them. No one could be a kinder friend or nurse than she has been to me. She has looked after me during my stay in

Holyoak, as if I had been a child. And now I am myself again, and able to fight the world once more, and next month must see me on my road to death or glory," cried Mrs Gerome, as she flourished an imaginary sword above her head.

Eudora started. She had not thought of this contingency, when informed of Mrs Gerome's profession.

"And shall we lose you?" she exclaimed, with wet eyes.

Mrs Gerome stopped short in her attitude, and regarded her young companion with interest. She was not used to receive much sympathy or affection as she passed through the world, and the genuine ring of distress in the girl's voice touched her.

"And do you mean to say that you have learnt to like me?" she demanded.

"How could I help it, dear Mrs Gerome, when you have been so kind to me?"

"Kind to you, child! In what has my kindness consisted? In encouraging your

pretty face to lighten up these dull, little rooms, and keeping you in from the sunshine to listen to an old woman's twaddle?"

"Oh! Mrs Gerome! how can you call yourself an old woman?"

"I am only five-and-thirty, but I feel very old, Eudora, and I am drawing perilously near the stepping-stone that will land me into middle age. For I am older than my years, child. I am worn out and feverish with the anxieties and disappointments of this world, and you don't know what your society has been to me. Like a cup of cold water in a thirsty land. I only wish I could take you away with me when I leave Holyoak."

The actress may have felt old, but she did not look so. She was a fine, handsome woman, with large eyes, a splendid figure, and an abundance of dark hair. Her complexion was rather coarse, roughened, perhaps, by the pigments she had been compelled to use, and her speech, also, was

You will never be happy in the way you dream of."

The blood mounted in a wave of crimson, even to the parting of Eudora's hair, but she was too much confused and distressed to attempt to refute the insinuation of her companion. She could not have trusted her voice to answer her.

"I don't like your friend," continued Mrs Gerome coolly, "and he doesn't like me. I am a good reader of character, and I fathomed his the first day we met—he is shrewd, crafty, and evil natured. He reminds me strongly of a person who has been the bane of my life. I could never be on even friendly terms with Mr Edgar Deane."

"But, Mrs Gerome, indeed you are mistaken," commenced Eudora, falteringly; "Mr Deane is Mrs Griffin's nephew, he—he—"

"I know all about it, my dear. You need not be at the trouble of making up any stories in order to try and deceive me. And I think it is a thousand pities that

you should be pent up in that ghostly old manor house, with no one but Mr Deane to turn to from the annoyance of Mrs Griffin. What will you do when the old lady dies, Eudora?"

"How can I tell?" exclaimed the girl. "It is by my father's wish that I remain there. Perhaps if any change should occur he will take me home to live with him. I don't know why I am not with him now."

"Yours seems a strange history, child," remarked Mrs Gerome, as she fixed her penetrating eyes upon Eudora. "I should like to hear the rights and wrongs of it. What sort of a person is this father of yours, who leaves you, year after year, under the charge of the old lady of the manor?"

"What sort of a person," mused Eudora. "Do you mean in appearance, Mrs Gerome? He is not at all handsome, at least I don't think so. He is a man of about fifty, tall and thin, with grey hair, and a large nose. And he is very silent. Sometimes he

hardly says a word for a whole day together."

"A pleasant companion," laughed Mrs Gerome. "And do you see him often, my dear?"

"No! very seldom, two or three times a-year, and sometimes not that. And when he comes, he seldom stays over the night."

"You do not care for your father, Eudora?"

"He does not care for me," replied the girl, in a low voice. "If he did, would he leave me to live all my life at the Grange?"

"Is Mrs Griffin no relation to you, then?"

"Not that I know of. I am only in her charge, because I have no mother."

"You do not remember your mother?"

"No! no! How I wish I did; but no one seems to remember her. My father will not speak on the subject, and Mrs Griffin has forbidden me to mention it. My dear, unknown mother! What can she have done to offend them all? I do

not even know what was her name. I have lived at the manor house ever since I was a baby, and I suppose I shall remain there till I die. I have no one to care for me in all the world."

"Poor child!" said Mrs Gerome, compassionately; "it is a terribly dull life for you, but it will not last for ever. You are too pretty for that. How I wish your father would let me bring you out upon the stage. What a sensation you would make!"

"*Me* upon the stage!" exclaimed Eudora, with genuine surprise; "but I thought that actresses must be beautiful?"

"And are you not beautiful?" cried Mrs Gerome.

"You are laughing at me," replied the girl, with a shamed face.

"I am not, indeed; but come now, let me have a good look at you. Well no, Eudora, perhaps, strictly speaking, you are *not* beautiful, but you possess what

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But Mrs Gerome was a clever and talented artist, with a warm, loving heart, and her society had infused a brightness into the life of Eudora Thane that it had never known from female companionship before. So that the girl was quite sincere in her regret at the idea of losing her friend, and Mrs Gerome seemed to feel for the first time that the loss would be reciprocal. She remained for a few minutes silent, and apparently ruminating on the idea called up by her last sentence, for her next words were a continuation of it.

“What a wonderful change it would be for you to see the world,” she said, “after the dull existence you lead in Holyoak ; and as for me, your society would make me feel I had kept something to remind me of the freshness and simplicity of the country amidst the heartless life I am



compelled to lead. But perhaps you would not care to come?"

Eudora hung her head over the violets, and answered nothing, only the fingers with which she was tying her flowers into bunches might have been seen to tremble.

"Have you never had any wish for a wider range of vision than Holyoak can afford you?" continued the actress, almost wistfully. "No anxiety to see something of the great world of London, and the way we live there? Do you mean to pass all your life, Eudora, in the company of a cross-grained old woman, who evidently cares nothing for you, and whom you cordially dislike?"

"Oh! no! I suppose not," said the girl, hesitatingly; "and I should like to go away for some reasons very much, only—only—"

"Only—there is a greater attraction to keep you here," laughed Mrs Gerome. "I have guessed your secret, Eudora, for a long time past, but it must not be, my dear.

dream of.

The blood mounted in a wave of crimson, even to the parting of Eudora's hair, but she was too much confused and distressed to attempt to refute the insinuation of her companion. She could not have trusted her voice to answer her.

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"I am not, indeed; but come now, let me have a good look at you. Well no, Eudora, perhaps, strictly speaking, you are *not* beautiful, but you possess what

chiselled, and your mouth a trifle smaller, but I doubt if that would improve you. You have glorious eyes, my dear, purple as a summer's night, and full of feeling—a charming complexion—the finest chestnut hair I have ever seen, and a model of a figure !”

“Oh ! Mrs Gerome ! you are flattering me.”

“I am not, indeed ! I am appraising you as an auctioneer appraises his goods, to see how much you would be likely to fetch in the professional market. And my verdict is that you are very much above the ordinary run of girls, and that you are on no account—mark my words—on no account, to throw yourself away in marriage, without due deliberation.”

“There is no fear of that,” replied Eudora blushing.

“You never know when the fear may



arise. And marriage—for a woman—is usually the end of all things, Eudora. *I* am an example of that.”

Eudora’s purple eyes opened to their widest extent.

“Are—are you married still then, Mrs Gerome?” she demanded, curiously.

“Yes, my dear, I am ; if you can call it being married when a woman never sees her husband from one year’s end to another. I was married twelve years ago, Eudora, and I lived six months with my husband, and then he went his way and I mine ; and if, in the course of our profession, we come across each other, we shake hands, and that is all.”

“Mr Gerome is an actor, then ?”

“Yes, he is, and a very good actor too, in more ways than one. I had managed to support myself up to the time I met him, but I could not manage to support him into the bargain, and perhaps two or three others beside him. So, when my

It was a wrench, Eudora, but it had to be done. He is one of those handsome rascals that hold their power over a woman so long as she sees them, and he would have worked me to death whilst he lived in idleness upon my earnings. That is the sort of man he is."

"And yet you loved him?" said Eudora.

"How do you know that?" demanded the actress quickly, and then she dropped her eyes again. "Well, yes, I loved him, but that has nothing to do with the matter. Men, as a rule, do not behave best to the women who love them."

Mrs Gerome turned her head away as she spoke, and busied herself with some ornaments upon the mantelpiece. Eudora, who felt instinctively that she was suffering, left her position, and passed one arm gently round her waist.

"I wish I could comfort you," she whispered.

Mrs Gerome's change of manner was almost startling.

'4 "You comfort me, you baby!" she replied, with a harsh laugh; "it strikes me that you require more comfort yourself than I do. I should really like to speak to that father of yours. I wonder if he would condescend to give me an interview. When do you expect to see him at Holyoak again?"

"That is impossible to say, Mrs Gerome. He comes and goes so mysteriously. We never have any warning of his advent. But it is a long time since we have seen him now—not since last November."

"Doesn't he write to you?"

Eudora shook her head—

"Never to me! I think Mrs Griffin has letters from him sometimes, because he sends her money for my keep. And then she says he sends his love to me,—that is all."

think not from the way he dresses me. But then Mrs Griffin is so very stingy. She may not spend all the money he sends for my use."

"It is the most mysterious case I ever heard of!" cried the actress. "Here are you—a girl evidently of good birth and breeding—buried at Holyoak with an old woman like Mrs Griffin, who is too rich to require the money she accepts for keeping you, and yet who treats you neither as a dependant nor a relation—I cannot make it out!"

"Neither can I," said the girl, "and it is of no use trying. But, Mrs Gerome, do you really think Mrs Griffin is so rich. If you saw the way in which she lives you would not say so."

"The report is that she has enormous wealth, but is keeping it all for her grand-nephew, Mr Deane, so I suppose that some

day your sinister-looking friend will come into a fortune."

"*Don't* call him that," said Eudora pleadingly. "You would not, if you knew him. You can't think how good he is to his old aunt. Not one bears with her whims and fancies as Edgar—I mean, as Mr Deane does."

"And he has taken up his residence at the manor house."

"Only since Christmas, and because Mrs Griffin begged him to do so. He was very much vexed to leave London, where he was studying for the Civil Service ; but she made such a point of his remaining in Holyoak. And by-and-by, as you say, I suppose he will have no need of a profession."

"He is wise to mind his P's and Q's though. Mr Deane knows on which side his bread is buttered, and shows his sense in remaining on the spot. Mrs Griffin is just the sort of old ogre who would turn round at the last moment and leave all her money to a charity instead."

Deane. She thinks there is no one in the world like him."

"And you follow her example."

Eudora was too truthful entirely to deny the fact.

"He is very good to me. I have every reason to be grateful," she replied, with burning cheeks.

"Ah! child! child! be warned in time. You had better, a thousand times, obtain your father's permission to go on the stage, and come out in the world with me. It isn't a kind world, on the whole, to women, but it is less cruel than men."

"This is the second time you have alluded to my going on the stage," said Eudora, more with a view to change the conversation than with any idea that the proposal was feasible. "But is not a long training necessary to enable one to act in public?"

"I like you, and I would train you," replied Mrs Gerome confidently.

"Do you think I have any talent?"

"I don't know; but I think you have sufficient, that is, for an ordinary actress. You might make an extraordinary one, for aught I know, but I could not tell that until you had been tried. But you have feeling, Eudora—deep and passionate feeling—and the power of expressing it. And the rest would come easy."

The girl listened with curiosity, but without eagerness. The idea of becoming an actress evidently held no particular attraction for her. It did not blend with the career she had chalked out for herself.

"It must be a very merry life," she said, presently.

"No! child! Don't run away with that idea. An actress's life is not merrier than that of any other woman. It is just as full of crosses, and disappointments, and heart-burnings—perhaps a little more

But it has one advantage. It is full of work and change. We live in such a continual hurry and bustle that we have no time for brooding or tears—often no time to think of bodily sickness—until we are compelled to lie down in our graves for good and all. And the only way to go through this life with any comfort, Eudora, is *not* to think."

"I should not like that," replied the girl, who had returned to her occupation of tying up the violets. "I could not part with my thoughts. They are the only things that I can call my own."

"They are doing you an incalculable amount of harm, my dear, particularly when they run in the direction of Mr Deane. By the way, Eudora, where does your father live?"

"I am afraid you will hardly believe me, Mrs Gerome, when I tell you that I do not know."

"Well, this is the strangest, most incomprehensible thing of all!" cried the actress, "that you should not even know where your father lives. Is it possible, Eudora? You excite my curiosity concerning him to the last degree. He must be a descendant of the man in the iron mask."

Eudora's eyes filled with tears of vexation and shame.

"Indeed, it is possible, Mrs Gerome. Sometimes I have thought, from the beautiful fruit and flowers he sends Mrs Griffin, that he must live in the country, but his letters generally bear the London post-mark. I have questioned Mrs Griffin several times on the subject, but she only says it is no business of mine, and that when I go to live with my father I shall know all about it."

"She thinks that you *will* go to live with him some day then?"

"I don't know what she thinks. She may only say it to silence me. I know

nor sister, nor brother to go to for either comfort or advice," replied Eudora, relapsing into tears.

Mrs Gerome's arms were round her in a moment.

"Don't cry, dear—it isn't worth it! Nothing is worth crying for in this world. And I will always be your friend, Eudora. If ever you need one, you must come to me. How old are you, my dear?"

"Eighteen," sobbed the girl.

"Well, you will soon be your own mistress, and then you will be able to carve out a life for yourself, and be free of all these petty annoyances and troubles. Only don't rush from the frying-pan into the fire, and be tempted to exchange a temporary slavery for a permanent one. Take your time, and look about you. You have seen nothing of the world as yet, nor the people who live in it. You have been

brought up like a child in a prison. Don't decide on anything till you get outside the bars ; and, perhaps, you will thank me for having saved you from an irretrievable error."

Eudora but half understood the meaning of her friend's words, but she knew that they conveyed hope for the future, and she dried her eyes, and resolved to be brave.

"I am afraid I must go home now," she said, as she rose to her feet, "for Mrs Griffin will be very angry if I am not there to give her her luncheon."

"She could not keep you more rigorously in attendance on herself if she paid you for your services," remarked Mrs Gerome.

Eudora laughed lightly at the idea. The attendance on an old woman's wants was evidently not the circumstance that planted a sting in her young life.

"Yes ; she is very particular," she replied. "She will not get up, nor go to bed, nor take any of her meals without me.

— — — — — Mrs Griffin passes so much of her time in her own room. He would be very lonely if I were not there.”

“I suppose so,” said Mrs Gerome, significantly. “Well, my dear, I wish you well out of it all.”

“Oh, how I wish you were not going away!” cried Eudora, as she embraced her. “What shall I do with myself when you are gone? Somehow I fancied that you meant to live here all your life.”

“What a prospect!” exclaimed the actress, shrugging her shoulders. “It has been all very well for a few months, Eudora, but another half-year of it would kill me. I wish, however, I had spoken of my profession before, and prepared you for our separation. But never mind. My instincts tell me we shall meet again. Besides, I shall be another month in Holy-oak, and who can tell what will happen

in a month? So dry your eyes, my child, and run back to your abominable old woman. Eudora, you are positively lovely! I believe crying agrees with you. It is a sin you should be buried in this hole!"

The girl made no answer to her friend's remark, but her heart throbbed with pleasure at hearing it. Some one else had said the same thing to her before, but she had only half believed it. To have the fact endorsed by one of her own sex was doubly valuable to her. It not only stamped his approval with the hall-mark of truth, but rendered her more worthy of it in her own eyes. As she walked back to the manor house that day, Eudora's heart, notwithstanding the approaching loss of Mrs Gerome, was dancing with delight.



CHAPTER II.

“HAVE I SUCCEEDED?”

MOST people who had lived in towns, or in the more picturesque parts of the country, would have endorsed Mrs Gerome's opinion when she called the village of Holyoak a “hole,” for it was as flat and uninteresting a place as could be found in the length and breadth of England. Its buildings were all ugly and modern. There was not a ruin, nor an ancient moss-grown wall, nor a tumble-down bridge to be found there ; and it was destitute of foliage, except a few poplars ; and of water,—except a few duck ponds.



And with all these disadvantages it possessed yet another—it was miles away from a railway station or a town. Mrs Gerome had had her own reasons for temporarily locating herself in a place where no one from the outside world was likely to see or hear of her; but how any one could take up a life-long residence in Holyoak was a mystery. Yet Mrs Griffin had done so. Mrs Griffin had occupied the manor house—a hideous square, white building, which looked like a reformatory or an hospital, ever since her marriage with the late Mr Griffin, which had taken place in some remote ages, no longer in the memory of man. And here she had brought up Eudora Thane, whose loveliness had suffered no blight from its uncongenial surroundings, but flourished, as the violets and primroses did, under the shade of the damp and musty laurels that enclosed the manor house drive. She and the wild flowers seemed to be the only young and

neglect and decay—proofs of the avarice of the mistress who presided over it. The gravelled paths were green with moss and weeds, which it was no gardener's duty to remove ; the box edgings worn and brown ; the stables shut up and empty ; the walls of the house stained with damp and mildew. The manor was large, containing perhaps some thirty rooms, but most of them were never opened, and the two servants, who had grown grey in Mrs Griffin's service, and waited on patiently in hopes of a legacy at her death, had lost the keys that once fitted in the doors.

Yet the girl who came bounding up the drive, with her glowing face, and light buoyant step, did not stop to think of the sadness and desolation that surrounded her. She had grown up with it : it had become too familiar for remark : perhaps she did not dream of a brighter and happier home. At

that moment, at least, she would not have exchanged it for a paradise that did not contain the one person that occupied her thoughts. Certain words that Mrs Gerome had used, and allusions which she had made, were still ringing in her ears, and turning the dull and barren place into a heaven for her. They were reflected in her bright eyes and cheeks, as she opened a door on the ground floor, and came suddenly on a young man busied with some books and papers.

"Oh, Mr Deane!" she cried, with her face all aglow, "I thought you had gone to Walshott,"—(Walshott being the nearest town, and a distance of ten miles away).

Edgar Deane thrust the papers he was engaged upon to one side, before he answered her. The expression of his face had been harassed and careworn, but as he met her eyes he smiled, though somewhat wearily. He was a handsome man, as far as features went, and he looked his best when he smiled, and especially when he smiled at

a narrow jaw, and small mouth, with thin, compressed lips, a mouth which would have told an acute observer that his disposition was neither open nor kind. Yet Edgar Deane was uniformly courteous and obliging, at all events to the inmates of the manor house.

“I intended to have gone to Walshott,” he replied, as he carefully folded the letter he had been reading, and replaced it in its cover, “and had made all arrangements for doing so, but at the last moment Aunt Deborah wanted me to write some business letters for her, so I put off my jaunt until to-morrow.”

“How good you are,” said Eudora. “You are always putting your own inclinations to one side, in order to oblige somebody else. You could not be more attentive to Mrs Griffin if she were your mother.”

“She is my father’s aunt,” replied Mr Deane quietly, “and I owe a great deal to

her. I hope that, however long her life may be spared, she will never find me less dutiful. But where have you been all the morning, Eudora?"

"Have you missed me?" asked the girl, quickly.

"Naturally. Do I not always miss you?"

"I thought you were away, you know," said Eudora, with a little hesitation, "or—or I should have come home sooner, in case you wanted me. I have been spending the morning with Mrs Gerome."

Mr Deane's brows contracted.

"I don't like that woman," he said shortly.

"Don't you!" exclaimed Eudora, in a disappointed tone. "Oh! she is so nice, so clever, and so kind! She sings beautifully—you can't think how much she has taught me since she has been here—and she is so droll. She makes me laugh all the time I am with her, with her mimicry and her fun."

is her stage.

"Do you know then—" commenced Eudora, wistfully.

"That she is an actress? Of course I do. All the world knows it. She has been on the stage for years."

"But it is not wrong, Edgar?"

"Not in its place, perhaps. Still Mrs Gerome is not the friend I should choose for you. The women of the stage, and the women of private life are best kept apart. However, she leaves Holyoak soon, I hear, so the intimacy cannot last much longer."

"She is going next month, and I am very, *very* sorry," cried the girl, heartily; "and she has never done me anything but good, Edgar. Pray, believe that."

"I don't believe it is in the power of anyone to do you harm," he answered, as he took her hand, and held it in his own. "You seem to me like the incarnation of

goodness. And yet you can understand—cannot you?—my fear lest anything should sully the brightness of your character?"

She could not answer him. The pressure of his hand sent the blood flying wildly about her heart and brain. She could only keep her eyes upon the ground, and tremble, as she wondered what his next words would be.

"*You* know what it is, Eudora, that makes life bearable to me in this dull, old manor house," he went on, presently, with his gaze fixed upon her blushing face; "that has made me resign my prospects of advancement; stop short, as it were, in my career, when I had nearly reached the goal—and sit down here, almost contented to see my fellows outstrip me in the race, and the days slip by in which I might have achieved success."

"You did it for the sake of your aunt," she whispered.

"Certainly, I did! I threw up my studies

cannot you imagine how I should have chafed under such an unnatural restraint if I had not possessed a hope to sustain and cheer me ? ”

“ Yes,” said the girl.

“ And that hope is—you know it, Eudora, you must have guessed it—the hope of winning your love. Come, sweetheart ! tell me—have I succeeded ? ”

He pulled her towards him by the hand he held as he spoke, without a doubt but that she would answer him in the affirmative. And a few days, even a few hours before, Eudora would certainly have said “ Yes.” Now, however, she hesitated to reply at all. Something — was it Mrs Gerome’s warning, or the instinct of her own heart—held her silent. She longed to gratify Edgar Deane and herself at the same time, yet she was dumb. The young man gazed into her speaking face for a



few moments, and then released her hand.

"Well! I won't worry you for an answer, now," he said, biting his lip. "I want your love to be a free-will offering, Eudora, and shall wait until you come and tell me it is mine. Why—it is actually one o'clock! Aunt Deborah will be fidgeting for her luncheon. Had you not better see after it?"

He replaced his watch in his pocket as he spoke, and regarded her stedfastly. Even in his love-making, Edgar Deane could be collected and cool.

"There is Barthomolew's step," cried Eudora. "I hear her going upstairs with the tray. I will be there as soon as she is."

But before she had crossed the threshold the thought struck her that he might misconstrue her silence, and be hurt by it,—this man, whom, in spite of her attempted self-denial, she knew that she loved—and

BOOK XXVIII.

“Edgar!” she whispered timidly. “I am not ungrateful!”

He was standing by the table as she addressed him, and a few steps brought him to her side. He took her in his arms and kissed her, as though he had been used to do so all his life.

“I knew I was not mistaken,” he said confidently. “I told you it would not be long before we understood each other.”

And with that kiss burning on her lips, Eudora broke from him, and ran up stairs. As she reached the upper landing, she paused for a moment to recover her senses and her breath, and to wonder she could ever have deceived herself with regard to her feelings for Edgar Deane. But her eyes were open now! She knew she loved him—and no warnings, had they been thundered forth from Heaven itself, would have stood between her heart and his.

Edgar loved her! That was all she knew, or cared to know, and her head was still swimming with the consciousness of that mighty truth as she entered Mrs Griffin's presence.

The old lady and her surroundings were as far removed from anything like romance or excitement as could well be imagined. The chamber which she occupied, and from which she seldom emerged, was large and comfortless, whilst the scanty furniture that clothed it was of the meanest description. The old-fashioned tent bedstead, with its hangings of faded moreen; the painted chest of drawers, surmounted by an army of physic bottles; the worn and patched carpet; all told the same tale of extreme poverty or extreme avarice. Mrs Griffin herself, now verging on eighty years of age, was seated in a cane-bottomed chair, and enveloped in a stuff dressing-gown that had done her good service for the last five years, whilst before her her

piece of dry bread, which was all the luncheon the mistress of the house allowed herself from a larder that might (had she so chosen it) been furnished as well as any in the county. But Eudora was used to the sight, and evinced no surprise at it. As she entered the room, Mrs Griffin turned her sharp hawk-like eyes upon her.

“Where have you been all this time?” she inquired, in a shrill and cracked voice.

She was a wonderful-looking old lady. Her skin was as yellow and apparently as tough as parchment; and looked still more yellow from contrast with her snow-white hair and eyebrows, from beneath which gleamed two restless black eyes. Her nose was large and beak-like; indeed, altogether she presented very much the appearance of a bird of prey about to pounce upon her listener. But she was a very tough old woman, with a constitution of iron; an

old woman who would boast that in winter she removed her wig and rubbed her bald scalp every morning with a piece of ice ; and who had no sympathy whatever with headaches, or toothaches, or backaches, and considered it a personal injury if any one about her presumed to be ill. In this particular, Eudora entirely pleased her ; for the girl seemed unacquainted with fatigue or sickness, and her selfish old guardian kept her in consequence in constant attendance upon her. But she liked the girl nevertheless, and her querulousness arose more from the fact that she had missed the sight of her bright face than from anger at her absenting herself.

" Where have you been ? " she repeated ; " trapesing all over the place in search of violets, or some such nonsense, I suppose. Young girls weren't allowed to waste their time after that fashion when *I* was young ! "

Eudora did not immediately reply. Something held her back from reposing

in Edgar Deane. She moved the small table with the luncheon tray upon it nearer to the old lady's chair, and lifted the cover off the gruel basin, and sat down on a stool at her feet, and smiled pleasantly up in her face, before she attempted to satisfy her curiosity. And it was evident that there was some sort of sympathy (deep hidden as it might be), between these two incongruous-looking friends, from the way in which the old woman's withered hand rested for a moment on Eudora's sunny hair, before she directed her attention to her uninviting meal.

"You had Mr Deane with you, so I knew that you could not want me," said Eudora, presently. "He told me he had been writing letters for you."

"Ah! yes! He is a good lad—dutiful, and affectionate, and kind. His own father couldn't have been better to me than he is.

And a pattern in his conduct, too. Quietly behaved, and serious, and economical! I couldn't have borne a wasteful, extravagant young man about me. There's too much of that sort of thing now-a-days. And my income couldn't have stood it. I am not rich enough. But Edgar is as careful as myself. Mr Overton thinks he is quite a model."

"Has Mr Overton been here this morning?"

"Only for a minute, to inquire after my health. Mr Overton is always attentive to me. But I told him he need not trouble himself so often. I shall live for many years yet; many, many years. That is what makes Edgar's conduct so praiseworthy. It isn't as if he were waiting for dead men's shoes. Everybody knows how healthy and strong I am."

"I should think so, indeed," cried Eudora, heartily; "and Edgar would not be guilty of so mean an action. Only this

would be spared to us for many years.

"And so I shall, my dear—so I shall," returned Mrs Griffin, confidently, as she consumed her gruel; "and that is why I am obliged to be so careful with my expenditure. Money won't last for ever, Eudora, and I have many expenses to defray that ought not to fall to my share."

"Not for *me*, I hope, Mrs Griffin," said the girl, timidly. "My father does not allow you to be put to any expense on my account, does he?"

The voice was so wistful that the old lady hesitated before deceiving her. But the wish, so strong with stingy people, to appear generous, overcame the more natural desire to speak the truth.

"Well, my dear, your papa naturally makes me a small allowance for your keep—how could I have fed and clothed you all these years without. Still, I cannot say he entirely provides for your being boarded



and lodged as *I* board and lodge you, for it isn't every one that can boast of having such a house as the manor over their heads, and I am sure you enjoy every luxury and comfort consistent with your station in life. Don't you, my dear?"

"Oh! yes!" replied Eudora, mechanically.

If comfort and luxury consist in eating cold meat for dinner, four days out of the seven, and bread and cheese for supper every night, then Miss Thane might certainly have been said to be lapped in it. But the girl was not thinking of such trifles at that moment. Her thoughts were still occupied with what Mrs Gerome had said that morning, and she felt more curious than she had ever done before to learn the secret of her neglected childhood.

"Mrs Griffin," she asked, suddenly, "is my father a rich man?"

The old lady pursed her withered lips together, as she invariably did at any symptom of curiosity on Eudora's part.

best answer for herself, my dear," she said, drily. "I am not in the habit of making impertinent inquiries as to the extent of my friends' resources."

"But you *must* know!" cried Eudora, clasping her hands together, and gazing up into Mrs Griffin's face with her earnest, violet eyes, "you must know all about me, and why my father leaves me here, instead of having me at home like other daughters. Why is it, Mrs Griffin? Do, do tell me. Surely I am old enough to know the truth!"

"You must ask your papa, Eudora," replied Mrs Griffin, as she buried her nose in her gruel, "he is the properest person for you to seek information from."

"But you know he won't tell me," said the girl, in a tone that sounded very much like despair, "no one will tell me. Why, I don't even know who I am! Am I to be kept in this ignorance all my life?"

"You don't even know who you are,"



repeated the old lady, "I cannot say I follow you. You are Eudora Thane, the daughter of Mr Thane, and a lady by birth and education. Is that not sufficient for you?"

"No! not half sufficient! I want to know who my mother was, and why I never see any of her relations, and those of my father. I want to know where she died, and how; and why papa cares so little for me that he leaves me in your charge from year's end to year's end, and scarcely notices me when we *do* meet! Mrs Griffin! did you know my mother?"

"Yes, Eudora, I did."

"Was she young and pretty? Did my father love her?"

"She was both young and pretty, and I have no reason to believe that your father was not fond of her," replied Mrs Griffin, after a pause. But she said the words reluctantly, and as if they had been drawn from her against her will.

"Then why doesn't he have me to live

place is by her father's side. Mr Overton wouldn't part with Madge and Nelly for all the world. Why is my father so different from theirs?"

"I cannot answer such questions, my dear, and I have told you so several times before. If you are determined to know the reason of Mr Thane's actions, you must appeal to himself. But a young girl is no fit judge of such matters."

"I can judge whether he loves me or not," said Eudora, sadly.

"You consider it hard that you should have been brought up at the manor house," continued Mrs Griffin, in her cracked voice. "Why, what do you suppose a gentleman could have done with a helpless baby thrown on his hands, unless he had found some kind friend to undertake the charge of it for him? Instead of constantly grumbling at your lot, as you do, you ought to be very thankful that I came forward to accept the

charge. It has not been altogether a thankful one.”

“ Am I very ungrateful ? ” said the girl wistfully. “ I hope not ! I know that I have often been troublesome, Mrs Griffin, but, indeed, I am happy on the whole. It was not of you I was thinking, but my father ; and I am not a baby now you see. I could be a help and a comfort to him, if he would only let me try. But to be kept in the dark about everything that concerns him ; not even to know where he lives, nor to have seen his home, it is so extraordinary and unnatural, that it makes people think there must be something wrong.”

Mrs Griffin started, and looked at the girl fixedly with her hawk-like eyes.

“ It makes people *think*,” she repeated, sharply, “ *who* thinks — who has been speaking to you on the subject. Not Edgar ? ”

Eudora flushed scarlet.

“ Oh, no ! not Edgar—but people often

... always making Jones about it, and I don't like it, it makes me feel as if I were nobody."

"Don't talk nonsense!" exclaimed Mrs Griffin. "How can you be nobody, when you possess a body and a soul? And learn to be grateful for the blessings you have, Eudora, and don't go sighing after those you are not likely to have. For I don't think you'll ever go home to live with your father, so you had better make up your mind to it at once."

"*Never!*" said the girl, in a bewildered way, "*never!* not all my life? Oh! what have I done that he should treat me so?"

"So you want to leave us!" retorted the old lady.

Eudora recollected herself. To leave them—to leave the manor house—to go away for ever—and *now!* No! that was not what she wanted. It was the last thing in the world that she desired. What

could she have been thinking of to hint at such a contingency.

"No! no!" she exclaimed, earnestly, "indeed I do not wish to leave you. After all, my father is a stranger to me, and I have known you all my life. Where could I be so happy as at the manor house? I was mad to dream of leaving the only home that I have ever had."

"I thought you would come round to see which side your bread is buttered," replied Mrs Griffin, grimly, "and even if you could persuade Mr Thane to receive you, I expect you would ask to come back to us before many weeks were over your head. It is not many young ladies have their own way as much as you do. You wouldn't like to be kept as strictly as Madge and Nell Overton are. But what have you done to your gown, my dear?" she continued, querulously, as Eudora rose, and discovered a rent in the skirt of her print dress. "Dear! dear! there's actually

yours :

Eudora could not help laughing.

"*New!* Mrs Griffin," she echoed, " why I wore this dress the whole of last summer, and the summer before, and it's been darned and patched twenty times already. Look here! it's as rotten as tinder," she continued, as she put her fingers into the rent, and made it a trifle wider.

Any glimmer of softness which the old woman might have displayed during their conversation vanished from her face in a moment at this exhibition of reckless extravagance.

"For shame! for shame!" she called out shrilly. "What do you mean by destroying good, serviceable clothes in that fashion. Who do you suppose is going to buy you new dresses when these are gone? *I* can't. I have the greatest difficulty in making the paltry sum your father allows for your maintenance go as far as it does, and if

you squander it in that way, Eudora, you will have to support yourself, for I shall not be able to do it. I am not rich enough."

Eudora stood before her with the torn skirt in her hand, regarding it thoughtfully.

"I am sorry," she said, sweetly; "it was careless of me. I ought not to have done it—but I will darn it up so beautifully that you shall not be able to see where the tear was."

Even Mrs Griffin could not withstand the girl's manner, it was so charmingly simple and true.

"You had better make it your afternoon's work then," she answered, in somewhat of a softer tone, "it will take you all that time to mend it properly, and Bartholomew can take up your luncheon to your room. Don't go downstairs and get chattering with Edgar, you will forget all about it."

"No! I won't," said Eudora. But still she stood there turning the skirt over and over in her hand.

old man.

"Mrs Griffin," said the girl suddenly, "if—if—you are so poor, and my father makes you so small an allowance for my maintenance, wouldn't it be better if I were to try and do something for myself?"

"Do something for yourself! What on earth do you mean?"

"Do something to make money; work like other women to support myself, so that I should be a burden to nobody."

Mrs Griffin peered at the girl through her glasses.

"And what would you do?" she inquired.

"Oh! I don't know," faltered Eudora, "but I suppose I should find out."

"*Find out!*" repeated the old woman, scornfully. "I'll tell you what you'd find out—that you had no bread to eat, and that before many weeks were over your head. Go to your room, child, and mend your frock, and don't talk rubbish to me.



Support yourself, indeed! You'd better learn not to tear your clothes before you talk of making your living. Work like other women! Who on earth can have put such a notion into your head?"

Eudora, afraid of the questions that might follow the old lady's indignation, was only too glad to escape to her own room, and sit down to the distasteful task of darning her skirt, whilst she refreshed herself with the uninviting luncheon of bread and cheese which Bartholomew presently set before her. She did not grumble at the privacy which this imposed upon her. She longed, but yet dreaded, to go downstairs and meet Edgar Deane again. Sooner or later she knew that it must be done, but it was a fearful joy, to which she was contented to look forward in the future; of which it made her happy, yet ashamed, to dream. As she sat through the sunny afternoon, stitching away at various tasks of needle-work, and postponing, by every means in

a heart devoid of care. The searching questions she had put to Mrs Griffin had ceased to trouble her. The remembrance of Edgar Deane's words and looks had taken their place, and whilst she thought of them she cared for nothing else.





CHAPTER III.

"I INTEND TO ALTER MY WILL."

MEANWHILE Edgar Deane, left to his own thoughts in the comfortless and gloomy room downstairs, did not appear so much at his ease as the girl whose mind was occupied by him. With Eudora's presence had vanished the ray of cheerfulness that had temporarily illuminated his countenance, and, as he found himself alone, he returned, with a look of deep anxiety, to the contemplation of the papers by which he was surrounded. They were not all papers for the Civil Service examination. There were private letters

as he perused it again and again, without seeing any way out of the difficulty which it presented to him. It was from a young man of the name of Hathaway—a chum of his, with whom he had lived whilst in London, and whom he had entrusted with the execution of a very delicate commission, and it ran thus:—

“DEAR DEANE,—It’s no use! I’ve seen Johnson, and he utterly refuses the idea of a compromise. It’s neck or nothing with you now—and if you can’t take up the bills, you’d better bolt. I ascertained the exact amount, with interest. Two thousand, three hundred pounds. It’s a crusher! but they won’t renew, so you’ll have to look it in the face. If I can do anything further in the matter, command me—Yours,

“H. HATHAWAY.”

Two thousand, three hundred pounds!
Edgar Deane leant his head upon his hands

and kept on saying the amount over and over again, as though he were repeating some charm by which he hoped to exorcise the dæmon of fear that possessed him. It might just as well have been twenty thousand pounds as two: for he could have paid the greater sum as easily as the lesser; considering that in all the world he did not possess one hundred that he could call his own.

He groaned aloud in the bitterness of his spirit as he thought of the folly which had led him into such trouble—the folly which ruins so many young men—that of trying their luck in the betting ring, against professionals whose trade is to enrich themselves at the expense of the inexperienced. Edgar Deane, for all his grave looks and quiet, subdued manner, had led a wild and dissipated life in London; and Mrs Gerome, with her acute perception and worldly knowledge, had read his character rightly when she decided that he was crafty and evil natured.

heart of Mrs Griffin towards him, and reassured the natural shyness that Eudora might have felt at being thrown so much in contact with a companion of the opposite sex. Indeed, it had had so good an effect with the old lady and made her express her approval of her nephew's conduct and character so openly, that Edgar Deane over-rated the interest she felt in him.

Mrs Griffin was pleased with, and proud of her heir. She believed him to be a young man of a careful and saving disposition, and, like all misers, she loved to think that at her death her property would pass into the hands of one who would hoard it as she had done herself. She did not love Edgar Deane. He was her brother's grandson, and the nearest male relation left to her, therefore it was natural he should be her heir, and because he was so, she had selfishly called on him to resign

a career by which he might have made himself independent, and take up his residence at the manor house, where she could contemplate the virtues of his character, and console herself with the idea of the worthy successor she would leave behind her. But she would not have done violence to her own feelings to afford him a single gratification in the present—the allowance she grudgingly made him was the very smallest on which he could look like a gentleman; and the dependent condition in which he was kept would have been quite intolerable to Edgar Deane but for two reasons—one was the age of his great-aunt—the other, the youth of Eudora Thane. By reason of the first he trusted, before long, to be emancipated from the bondage under which he groaned; and meanwhile the second was sufficient diversion to make him feel contented, even in slavery. To say that he loved Eudora Thane would be a blasphemy on the master-

learned to love any creature being except himself, but he admired and longed for her. Her innocence evoked the best feelings of which he was capable, but "bad was the best." He would sacrifice her as readily as any other if she stood in the path he had marked out for himself.

As he contemplated his present difficulties, however, and tried to think of a way out of them, the idea naturally entered his head of asking Mrs Griffin downright for the money to repay the debt. After all, what would such a sum be to her, whose income was said to be as many thousands as she spent hundreds. She would never feel the loss of it, and might just as well give it to him now as wait until she could not know the relief it would be to him. He miscalculated altogether the old woman's feelings respecting her hoarded-up money. He was not yet, at all events, sufficiently of a miser to be able

to enter into them. But, whether he could or not, it was the only way out of his difficulty ; the one chance left to him, and he resolved to try it at once. He need not tell his aunt the exact truth—so he said inwardly—he had always been clever at a subterfuge, and imagined he could engage her sympathy better if he made himself out a little more of a martyr, and a little less of a fool. He had yet to learn, with all his cunning, that the love of money has a power above all other vices to eradicate every spark of compassion from the heart, either for the weakness or the wickedness of our fellow creatures. After a long and secret cogitation, Edgar Deane rose wearily, and, securing his letters and papers under lock and key, went upstairs to have a chat with his aunt. This was his usual custom, after the farce which was called luncheon at the manor house had been disposed of—Mrs Griffin seldom emerging from the seclusion of her

CLOCK. SHE smiled, in her grim fashion, as Edgar entered her presence—for she was as fond of talking as any old lady of eighty can be, and would ramble on with stories of her youth by the hour together, when she could find an attentive listener. She was quite alone—still sitting in the chair where Eudora had left her, occupied with her knitting needles and some coarse yarn, which she was transforming into a winter petticoat.

“I hope you are feeling well, to-day, my dear aunt,” said Edgar Deane, politely, as he stooped to kiss her yellow, puckered cheek.

“*Well!*” she said, shrilly, “of course, I’m well. What ever ails me? I wasn’t brought up like the girls and boys of the present day, to lie in bed till noon, and wash in warm water, and be afraid to go out of doors if the sun doesn’t shine. I was reared in a sensible fashion, Edgar—

out of bed at six o'clock every morning, and into a tub of cold water, summer and winter, and you see what I am at eight-and-seventy years of age. Hale and hearty as a girl of eighteen, and likely to live for twenty years longer. Aye! that I am—twenty years longer—think of that!"

"I am sure I sincerely trust you may, Aunt Deborah," replied her nephew, "and twenty more added to them, if it is possible."

"Ah! you will have had enough of me by that time, my dear," said the old woman, shaking her head, "and will be a sensible, middle-aged man, ready to step into your property, and use it with care, as I have done. You must marry before that comes to pass, Edgar, and bring your wife home to the manor house, that she may learn to love it as much as I do."

Mr Deane shuddered inwardly as he

girl, but of course he didn't say so.

"I am afraid there is not much chance of my marrying, dear aunt," he replied, placidly. "What woman would accept a husband without a penny of his own? You know how completely dependent I am upon your kindness."

"But she would have a good home here, and every comfort and luxury, until I am gone, Edgar; and then you know that you will inherit all I leave behind me. I have no one but yourself with any claim upon me, therefore there is no fear of my little property being divided. But it isn't much, Edgar. You mustn't calculate on its being much."

"I never calculate upon anything, Aunt Deborah," replied the young man, with apparent sincerity. "I am a claimant upon nothing but your affection and goodness of heart."

This was just the sort of compliment that pleased Mrs Griffin, because it was so utterly untrue, and she nodded her tottering head in token of her approbation.

"That's right," she said. "Leave it all to me, Edgar, and you will have no reason to be disappointed."

"You are so kind, and generous, and charitable," continued her nephew, hesitatingly, "that I wish I might venture to enlist your sympathies on behalf of a poor friend of mine who has been very unfortunate lately."

But Mrs Griffin did not like the change of voice in which he uttered these words. It savoured of danger, and she answered him more tartly.

"A friend! What sort of a friend? I don't hold with people who are unfortunate. They generally bring their misfortunes on their own heads."

"I quite allow that—at the same time, some people are not as well able to cope

“I suppose your friend has lost money.”

“He has, I regret to say, and a considerable sum.”

“Then, drop him, Edgar, at once. No good ever came of keeping friends with a fool. He’ll be asking you to lend him some, next.”

“He could hardly do that, Aunt Deborah, when I haven’t a halfpenny of my own. But I should vastly like to lend it to him, if I could.”

“Don’t look to me to help you to it, then,” said the old woman quickly, “for I should be the worst friend you had if I did.”

“I don’t think you would, dear aunt,” replied Edgar, soothingly, “let me at least tell you the circumstances of the case. My poor friend came to me one day in the greatest distress. He had been foolishly drawn into losing some money—”

"How much?" interrupted Mrs Griffin—"five pounds?"

"Oh, no! more than that, a great deal."

"More than that! your friend must be a madman."

"I think he *was* mad at the time, and I am sure his distress is sufficient to drive him mad now. And not only him, but me, dear aunt, for, in my desire to help him, I put my name to bills for him, thinking I was perfectly safe in doing so, and—and—he is unable to take them up."

The murder was out now, and Edgar Deane leaned back in his chair, and passed his handkerchief over his brow. How would Mrs Griffin take it?

The way in which she took it was rather alarming. Her wooden knitting pins, and half-finished petticoat fell to the ground in a moment, whilst she sat bolt upright in her chair, and glared at her nephew with eyes that looked as though they had turned to stone.

enough to do for your friend, who ought to be hung?"

"It was very foolish, I acknowledge, dear Aunt Deborah," replied the young man, "it was worse than foolish, indeed—it was imprudent, wicked—but he was in such a fearful state of distress, and I believed so implicitly in his honour, that I backed the bills for him—you know what I mean—and since he cannot take them up, the penalty naturally falls upon me."

"Let it fall then," said the old woman grimly, "it will be a good lesson to you."

"But it is impossible—how can I liquidate the debt. I have no money, any more than he has. My character will be utterly ruined. I shall lose all my chance of entering the Civil Service, on any other," replied Edgar Deane, despairingly.

"And I suppose you expected *me* to help you?" continued Mrs Griffin; "you

thought that, because you are my heir, you could draw on me for ten or twenty pounds whenever it suited your convenience to do so—but you are mistaken, young man—vastly mistaken. My money has not been saved with care, and expended with prudence, in order to be thrown away at the will of a spendthrift."

"Don't call me so harsh a term as that, aunt. I have always been most particular with regard to my own expenditure, but in this case I was most thoroughly taken in. I know that I have not the least claim on your generosity, but I must confess that I hoped, when you knew the facts of the case, and that I was more sinned against than sinning, you might have the great goodness to help me through it. For I assure you, on my word of honour, it is for the first and last time, and that I shall never make such a call upon your purse again."

Mrs Griffin seemed a little softened by the promise.

“More than that, I am sorry to say,” replied Edgar. “You must prepare yourself, my dear aunt, to hear of a much larger sum. Men do not consider it worth their while to give promissory notes for so small an amount.”

“It is of no use appealing to *me*, then !” said Mrs Griffin, relapsing into her former sternness. “I am not prepared to say that I should feel inclined to advance you even so much as that.”

Edgar Deane felt desperate. It was, as his friend Hathaway had written, “neck or nothing” with him now, and he resolved to make the plunge.

“Aunt Deborah,” he began, with a face white with fear, “you have often told me, as you did just now, that I am to be your heir, and inherit all that you possess. Would it make very much difference to you if you gave me a little part of that



inheritance now? If, instead of leaving me everything, you would kindly pay this debt (as it were beforehand), and deduct it from my legacy? I know it is a very great boon to ask you, and that I have no right to expect your compliance; still, I have no one but yourself to apply to, and I am in the greatest difficulty I have ever experienced."

"What is the amount of the debt?" demanded Mrs Griffin sternly.

"Two thousand, three hundred pounds."

She heard the sum in silence; only looking at the young man fixedly, with her black eyes staring, and the corners of her withered mouth drawn down. Then she said abruptly,—

"Can you write a letter for me?"

"Certainly, dear aunt," cried Edgar, with alacrity, thinking she was about to send an order to her bankers for the money.

"Bring my writing-case and inkstand here then, and write from my dictation."

in hand, ready to transcribe her words.

“To Messrs Peveril and Pomfrey—(they are my solicitors, as perhaps you know, young man.”)

“DEAR SIRs,—I desire the presence of one or other of the heads of your firm at the manor house, Holyoak, without delay. Please to travel down as soon as possible after receiving this, and bring with you the draft of my will made in favour of Mr Edgar Deane.—I am, yours faithfully,

“DEBORAH GRIFFIN.”

“Do you understand why I require to see Peveril or Pomfrey?” inquired the old lady, as her nephew wrote the concluding word.

“No, indeed, dear aunt; how could I say?” he answered, although in his own heart he quite believed it was because she had decided to grant his request.



Mrs Griffin's voice, in its attempt at heroic anger, rose to a shrill scream, as she replied,—

"Because I intend to alter my will, Edgar Deane; because I refuse to leave the money I have carefully saved to a reckless and extravagant libertine; because, from this moment, you need no longer count on my death for receiving a single halfpenny! Do you think my fortune is not at my own disposal, and that I cannot leave it to Eudora Thane, or my maid Bartholomew, or Wilkins, the cow-herd, if I chose? Ah! you are very much mistaken. You have counted your chickens before they were hatched, young man, and you will have plenty of time to be sorry for it. I shall tell Peveril to destroy the old will, and I shall make a new one in favour of some one more worthy of my interest than you are. *Two thousand, three hundred pounds!* Why, my income would be gone in a month at this rate, and I

manner. No, no! you have done for yourself this day, Edgar Deane, as you will have reason to remember to the very last you live."

"But, my dear aunt, if you will only hear me explain—" stammered the unhappy youth.

"I will hear nothing. I will not even accept an excuse nor an apology. Your conduct does not deserve it, and from this day I utterly disown you, and never wish to see you again."

"But, Aunt Deborah—"

"You will return to London and your studies," continued the old lady, 'unflinchingly, "and will cease to remember that I ever offered you the manor house as a home. I did so, believing you to be a careful and prudent young man, but it is no shelter for spendthrifts or fools."

"Can nothing soften my conduct in your eyes?" said Edgar Deane.



"Nothing. I do not wish to hear you speak again, and the sooner you are removed from my presence the better."

"Then you are unjust to me, aunt, bitterly unjust!" exclaimed the young man warmly.

"I am the best judge of my own actions, and the reason of them," retorted the old woman.

"And do you *really* mean then to cut me off from all the advantages I have been led to expect would be mine? Do you *really* mean me to understand that from this day I am no longer your heir?"

"Most decidedly so! You are already disinherited. Your own confession did the deed."

"Then, by heaven, you shall repent it!" cried Edgar Deane, as the worst passions of his nature mantled in his face.

"Don't you presume to speak to me in that tone," replied Mrs Griffin angrily. "Leave the room at once, or I will ring the bell, and have you turned out."

“There is no need of violence, madam. Your wishes shall be instantly complied with, and to-morrow will see me clear of your presence altogether. But may I ask you one last favour? It is not a weighty one, and has nothing in common with this unhappy quarrel. Will you consent to keep the reason of our parting a secret? I will leave the manor as soon as it is possible, but I should be grateful if—at all events till I am gone—the news of this sudden rupture should not be communicated to the household.”

“I shall not speak of it to any one,” said Mrs Griffin, sharply. I am too angry and annoyed at my own folly in ever having believed in you, to wish to be made the laughing stock of the village. But I shall not alter my determination, young man. That letter will travel to London by the next post, and as soon as Peveril

reaches Holyoak, he draws up a fresh will for me. I would as soon leave my money to a lunatic now as to you."

"I can only bow to your decision, madam," said Edgar Deane, as he left the room.

But his heart was full of bitterness as he did so, and his soul thirsted for revenge. Mrs Griffin had driven forth a desperate man to hold counsel with the promptings of his evil nature alone.



CHAPTER IV.

“LOOK FOR ONE WITH A CHIPPED LIP.”

UDORA THANE, stitching busily at her open bedroom window, saw Edgar Deane pass beneath it on his way to the stables. She noticed his clouded brow and angry demeanour, and gazed wistfully after him, fearing lest her prolonged absence might have something to do with the change. But as he glanced upward, and caught sight of her, he smiled. Eudora always had the power to bring a smile into his careworn face.

“Are you going for a walk?” she asked, bashfully, half hoping he would invite her to join him.



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"No! I am going to ride to Walshott. I was on my way to the stables to order my horse."

"To Walshott! Will you be back in time for dinner?"

"It signifies little if I am not. I have occasion to send a telegram to London this afternoon. Can I do anything for you, Eudora?"

"No, thank you! Oh! yes! you can though—not for me, but for Mrs Griffin. She wants some camphor liniment dreadfully. Would you mind getting it from Lavis the chemist? It won't be a big parcel at all."

"I shall only be too happy to be of use to Aunt Deborah in any way," replied Edgar, biting his lip.

"But you must take a bottle with you, to bring it back in. Mrs Griffin is always very angry with me if I forget to send an empty phial for medicine, because we have so many; she says she won't pay for any more."

"I will not be a minute," cried the girl, excitedly, "and I will bring it down to the stables to you."

She flung her work to one side, and flew to Mrs Griffin's room. The happy moment had arrived, which she had so longed for, and so dreaded. She would stand side by side with Edgar again, and hear his voice, and feel the pressure of his hand.

"Mrs Griffin!" she exclaimed, as she gained admittance to the old lady's apartment, "Mr Deane is going to Walshott this afternoon, and he will bring us back some camphor liniment from Lavis. May I take a bottle for it?"

"Oh! Mr Deane is going to ride over to Walshott, is he? and is desirous to make himself useful as usual," remarked Mrs Griffin, sarcastically. "Well, my dear, I see no reason why he should not do so. But are you sure that we require more liniment?"

"Quite sure, Mrs Griffin. Don't you remember there was none the last time you had rheumatism in your arm? We finished the bottle a long time ago, and we really should not be without some in the house, when you may suffer at any moment."

"Well, if it must be, it must be, but there seems no end to this paying for physic," replied the old woman, pettishly. "I am sure my hand is always in my pocket for something or other. You and Barthomolew ought to know how to decoct these simple remedies, Eudora: they would be half the cost made at home; but the girls of the present day can positively do nothing."

"I shall be very glad to try, Mrs Griffin, if you will get me the recipes," said Eudora, timidly.

"Oh! yes! I daresay, and waste more money in the attempt than you would ever save. No, I think I had better stick to Lavis, though he does charge seventy-

choose a suitable bottle, Eudora, and let Mr Deane fetch the medicine, since he offers to do so."

Eudora could not account for the change in Mrs Griffin's manner as she mentioned her nephew's name, but she was used to her tempers, and only thought that her acerbity was due to some unexpected call upon her purse. So she quietly turned her attention to what she had been desired to do. The phials, both full and empty, were ranged, to the number of several dozen, on the top of a chest of drawers. It was one of Mrs Griffin's fancies to keep them in her sight, and she was as jealous of anyone touching her physic bottles as if they had been old and valuable china. Some had medicine remaining in them: drains of syrup—of laudanum—of steel—of the various remedies which the old lady had prescribed for herself (for she would not allow a doctor to enter the

house) for the last ten years, and to which she resorted at times to this day. Others were empty, and had been carefully washed and dried in anticipation of future use, and it was to this battalion of the army that Eudora naturally directed her attention. She had selected one, and was about to fit a cork to it, from a pile which were hoarded in the washing-stand drawer, when Mrs Griffin called her to her side.

"Let me see that phial. Why! you extravagant girl! you have actually chosen a perfect one, when there are at least a dozen chipped or cracked in the back row."

"But, Mrs Griffin, the liniment will run out of a cracked one, and be half lost before Edgar brings it to us."

"Nonsense! child! nonsense! Look for one with a chipped lip then. *That* will be safe enough if it is well corked. Stay! I know the very bottle I mean. I will fetch it for you." And the old woman left her chair, and hobbled to the

detected the phial she had spoken of, which she brought back triumphantly to Eudora. It was an ordinary physic bottle, holding half-an-ounce, and the lip had been broken in rather a peculiar manner in two places.

"It is too small," said Eudora, ruefully, "it won't hold enough liniment."

"Nonsense! my dear! it will do very well," replied Mrs Griffin, reseating herself. "What do I want with a quantity of liniment that I may never have occasion to use? It's sheer waste, Eudora, to spend money when there's no occasion for it, and the sooner you learn that lesson the better."

Eudora was not inclined to dispute the fact. She was only anxious to get back to her lover, so, fitting a cork to the broken-lipped bottle, she ran lightly from the bedroom to the stables. Edgar Deane was in the yard, leaning against the wall,



and smoking moodily, whilst the manor house factotum, half-gardener and half-groom, saddled the cob he kept for his own use. This horse had been the sole luxury allowed by Mrs Griffin to her nephew, and it was only a "screw" hired from a neighbouring farm, on which Edgar had often said he was half ashamed to be seen. At the sight of Eudora he threw away his cigar. Edgar Deane was almost fastidious in his courtesy towards women. It was the chief attraction he possessed in their eyes.

"Here is the phial!" she exclaimed, with a blushing face, as she stuffed it into his coat pocket, "and please ask Lavis to fill it with the same camphor liniment he sent us before; and Mrs Griffin says it ought not to cost more than fourpence."

"Very good, Eudora, I will not forget a single item of my estimable aunt's commands. And what have you been doing with yourself since we met last?"

anything of what had taken place between Mrs Griffin and himself—but Eudora felt her cheeks burn under his scrutiny.

“Nothing—that is, nothing in particular,” she answered. “Mrs Griffin set me a task to do, and I have been sitting in my room, working and—and—thinking.”

“Thinking of *me*, Eudora?” he inquired.

“Yes,” she said, after a little struggle with herself—“thinking of you. How could I do otherwise after what—what has happened.”

“And were they pleasant thoughts, dear?”

“I—I—hardly know! It seems all so strange and new to me. I cannot believe it.”

“I will make you believe it, Eudora. More, I will make you believe in *me*, whatever odds there may be against it. There is small chance of our lives coming together just yet,” he went on more cauti-

ously, and remembering that, for awhile at least, it was politic to pretend that all was as smooth as usual between himself and Mrs Griffin, "because you know that I am unfortunately dependent on my aunt Deborah."

"Don't say 'unfortunately,' Edgar, for she loves you dearly, and I am sure she will put no obstacle in the way of your happiness."

"That remains to be proved," said the young man, with a sigh, "but my duty is unmistakably towards her for the present. If, in the future, however, she should attempt to come between us, Eudora, I will carve out a way to fortune for you and myself with my own hands. Don't think I am greedy of my aunt's money, child. The longer she lives to enjoy it, the better I shall be pleased, and it could not weigh with me one moment in the balance as yourself. The best good it could afford me would be the gift of your

... as you would have shared my fortune."

"Oh! Edgar, no! What could money be to me in comparison with your love?"

She had never spoken so openly to him as this, and he was about to make some suitable reply, when the stable-keeper appeared with the cob, ready equipped for its journey, and prevented further conversation. Edgar sprang into the saddle, and gathering up the reins with one hand, extended the other to Eudora.

"Good-bye!" he said, with a fervent pressure, that sent the blood mantling to her cheeks. "Remember, nothing is certain in this world, and you have promised to share my poverty."

"You will be back soon," replied the girl, not knowing what to say.

"In three hours, at latest, but Aunt Deborah knows me too well to wait dinner for me."



He cantered off as he spoke. Eudora gazed after him with loving eyes, and the stable-keeper guessed her thoughts.

"He be a real, good young gentleman, he be," he said, in reference to Edgar Deane. "'Taint many as would think of liniments, and such like, for an old woman's aches and pains, when they be cantering about a gay town like Walshott."

"He has the kindest and most considerate heart it is possible for a man to have," replied Eudora, warmly. "He is more like a son than a nephew to Mrs Griffin, and I don't know what she would do without him."

"And I wonders what *you* would do without 'im, my pretty, young lady," thought the factotum, as Eudora returned to the manor, "for it don't take more than two eyes to see you're as sweet on 'im as a cat on a fresh mackerel."

But she was unconscious of his vulgar comments, and too happy and preoccupied

and darning, singing even more cheerily than before, and when five o'clock sounded, and it was announced that Mrs Griffin's dinner was ready, she appeared at the old lady's door, to assist her in getting downstairs, with a fresh, young face, beaming with contentment and satisfaction. It was usually Edgar Deane's office to conduct his old aunt to the dining-room, and Eudora was much concerned lest Mrs Griffin should miss his aid.

"Lean hard on me, Mrs Griffin," she said, more than once. "I am not so good as Edgar, I know—how could I be?—but I am strong enough to make a crutch as far as the dining-room."

"You are strong enough to make a crutch through life," replied the old lady, as she pinched Eudora's blooming cheek. "You are a good, honest girl, my dear, with no nonsense nor deception about you,



and you will reap your reward some day you may depend upon that."

Eudora thought Mrs Griffin was alluding to Edgar—what higher reward could any woman gain than the privilege of being his wife—and had become acquainted in some mysterious way with the secret of their mutual love, and her face burned in consequence, with pleasure and confusion.

The dinners served by Mrs Griffin's housekeeper were not usually calculated to tempt a fastidious or jaded appetite, but the mistress of the house seemed perfectly satisfied with them, and Eudora was too healthy and young—and too much in love—to care what she ate, or if she ate at all. The repast on the present occasion, which began with a soup—which appeared to have been made after the celebrated French recipe of "two buckets of water to one onion"—was succeeded by a boiled rabbit—a very

crumpled up on the dish as if it were ashamed to appear without its skin, which, indeed, as it must certainly have been the larger half of it, it might well be. These dainties were followed by a small tapioca pudding, with which the dinner of the rich Mrs Griffin, said to be worth, at least, seven or eight thousand a-year, came to a conclusion.

But both parties seemed satisfied. Mrs Griffin mumbled at her minced rabbit and tapioca pudding without a murmur, and Eudora sat opposite to her, blithe and merry, making up with huge slices of bread for the deficiencies of the meal. At last the staid Mrs Barthomew placed a plate of dry biscuits and a decanter of sherry on the table, and retired. Mrs Griffin crunched a cracknel, and drank a couple of glasses of sherry. Wine was the only article of domestic



consumption on which the old woman spent a reasonable amount of money. She liked good sherry, and she generally consumed three or four glasses during the evening. When she left the dinner table it was her custom to have the decanter carried up to her bedroom, in case she required some during the night, and as she rose on the present occasion, Eudora darted to her side, and offering her one arm, seized the wine in her other hand. But Mrs Griffin would not allow her to be thus encumbered.

"No, no, my dear," she said, kindly, "the old woman is quite enough for you. Ring for Barthomolew to bring the sherry."

There was something unusually gentle in Mrs Griffin's voice and manner that evening. Perhaps her disappointment in Edgar Deane had softened her feelings towards the girl, whose existence she had almost overlooked in her trust in the young man who had turned out so con-

nephew was put into execution. When she had reached her bedroom, and Eudora had settled her as comfortably as was possible in her comfortless chair, the old lady placed her hand affectionately on the young girl's chesnut-crowned head.

"You are a good child," she repeated, "and you will reap your reward."

Eudora was gratified by her approval, but she little guessed the motive from which it sprung. She little dreamt that this stern, jaundiced old woman, who turned each coin three times before she could make up her mind to spend it, was actually thinking of constituting *her*—Eudora Thane—who had no possible claim upon her of blood or gratitude, sole heiress to her accumulated savings. Mrs Griffin did not intend her to know it.



The knowledge had been a source of evil in her grand-nephew's case, and led him on to deeds of extravagance and folly; therefore Eudora should be kept in ignorance of her good fortune until it was actually in her hands. And meanwhile—so Mrs Griffin chuckled to herself—meanwhile she would have time to imbue the girl with a love of thrift and saving, for she had many years yet to live, she was glad to think. She was as hale and hearty as a woman of eight-and-seventy could expect to be, and might depend on twenty years' more enjoyment of hoarding for those who should come after her. Yes! and Eudora should do the same; should learn, under her tuition, to love to do the same. As the thought passed through her mind, she felt affectionate for the first time towards the orphan whom she had reared from a baby.

"You have always been a good girl, Eudora," she went on presently, as her

and you will continue to be so, I am sure, and learn to be more careful too, and not tear your good frocks, nor throw coppers away on hardbake, or beggars, or any such nonsense, and then you may live to be a rich woman—rich and respected, as I am.”

Eudora’s heart sank at the prospect of no more hardbake, for she was but a child still, loving all childish things ; but she was both pleased and touched at the rare reward of Mrs Griffin’s praise, and she stooped down and kissed the old lady’s hand.

“Dear Mrs Griffin,” she said, gratefully, “I am so glad if I have pleased you, and, indeed, I will try to be more steady, and keep my clothes in better order. I have darned that place beautifully,” she continued, with an ingenuous smile ; “and I am sure you will not be able to find out where the rent was when you see me with it on to-morrow.”



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"That is right, my dear ; a penny saved is a penny gained ; always remember that ; and a woman cannot save more profitably than in taking care of her clothes. A great deal too much money is spent on dress now-a-days. When I was a girl, a gown lasted us for four or five years ; now, we must have a new one in as many months. Look at my dress," continued Mrs Griffin, holding up a scanty skirt of what had originally been black merino, but was now brown, yellow, and green with age and stains ; " Barthomolew will tell you that I've worn this gown for six years, and it's as good now as the day I put it on. Not a rent in it anywhere. She wanted to persuade me to have it dyed this spring, but I wouldn't. What's the use of dyeing a good dress like this ? It would be throwing money in the gutter. You must learn to be as careful as I am, Eudora, and then you will be as comfortably off, perhaps, in your old age."

anything to please you. And she gazed gratefully; "and Barthomolew thinks that my cotton dresses have really lasted very well."

"So I do, miss!" acquiesced the servant, who was in attendance on her mistress. "This is the third summer you've worn your holland dresses; and if it wasn't for their being so short in the sleeves and skirts for you, they would almost last another year."

"Of course they will last another year," interposed Mrs Griffin, fretfully; "they must be let down and let out. You mustn't heed what Barthomolew says, Eudora, she knows nothing about such things. Servants never do. Holland ought never to wear out. How should it? And your frocks will last for several summers yet."

"I daresay they will," replied Eudora, cheerfully; "we will put a flounce round the bottom next year, and then they will be long enough. Do not worry about them,



dear Mrs Griffin ; I will think of some good plan to make them last."

"Don't attend to what Barthomolew will tell you, then," said the old lady, still crossly. "All *she* thinks of is the time when they will become her property. I shouldn't have a gown left in my wardrobe if she had her will."

"And I might go without clothes at all if I waited till *hers* was ready to give away," grumbled the maid, behind her back.

Old Mrs Griffin's ears were as sharp as a girl's.

"What are you muttering there?" she demanded, turning round on Barthomolew.

"I was only asking if you'd take another glass of sherry, ma'am," returned the woman, obsequiously.

"No! I've said 'No' twice before! Are you getting deaf as well as stupid? There's not above a couple of glasses left in the decanter. I must keep those for the night."

“No, my dear, there’s quite enough. If I wanted more, I should ask for it, and Barthomolew knows that as well as I do. And now you had better leave me, for I feel inclined for my usual reading.”

Eudora rose at once. She was used to this little fiction on the part of Mrs Griffin, whose nightly habit it was to fall asleep nodding in her chair, whence, after the lapse of an hour or two, she was conveyed to bed, almost in an unconscious condition, by her maid. But nothing would have induced the obstinate old lady to go to rest earlier than other people. She always maintained that she read her Bible until ten o’clock, and almost believed that she did so. The young girl’s evenings had thus been spent entirely alone, that is, until the advent of Edgar Deane, and for years she had employed them in reading or study. But since she had had a com-

panion for her solitude, Eudora had occupied the interval between dinner and bedtime with needlework, and as soon as she bid Mrs Griffin "good-night," she flew with her work-basket to the dining-room.

There was a drawing-room in the manor house, but it had been locked up and unused for years past. The only apartment kept for general use was the one from which the meal had just been cleared away, and which looked gloomy and desolate enough with only a pair of candles burning in the middle of the old-fashioned mahogany table. Eudora glanced round it with a sigh ; Edgar had not yet returned. But she knew he would not be long, and she settled herself to her work, in a little tremor of delightful anticipation as she thought of his return and the happy evening they would spend together. They had had many happy evenings already—hours in which Edgar had talked to her of his college and town life—of his friends

to her his hopes and fears for the future, and his regrets for the past. But she felt now that she had never enjoyed his confidences and companionship as she might have done ; as she *should* do from that hour. For she had not guessed why he should confide his troubles and his joys to her ; she had not known the delicious truth that he looked upon her as the *confidante* and consoler of his future life. How different all that he said now would appear in her eyes ! How warmly she could enter into his plans ! How delightful it would be to feel that everything he wished or worked for henceforward must bear a reference to herself. By-and-bye she heard his horse's hoofs as they turned off from the gravelled drive into the stable-yard, and bent her burning cheeks over her work as she thought of the greeting her lover would give her.

A minute later, and Edgar Deane had entered the room. Eudora looked up, and was struck with the pallor of his countenance. In a moment all thoughts of herself were merged in thoughts of him.

"What is the matter?" she exclaimed, fearfully. "Are you ill? you are as white as a sheet!"

"Am I?" returned the young man, with a forced laugh, as he passed his hand across his brow; "it must be the cold! You can have no idea how chilly it has turned this evening, Eudora. I think there must be a storm brewing somewhere. My fingers are positively numbed."

"And there is no fire in the grate," said Eudora, regretfully, "and I am afraid to order one. Mrs Griffin won't allow a fire to be lighted after April, nor before November. She say it makes people delicate. And you are positively shivering. What can I do to warm you?"

"Nothing—nothing," he replied, hastily,

“And did you do what you wanted? And did you get the liniment?” asked Eudora.

She was a little disappointed at Edgar’s manner; for he seemed entirely to have forgotten the looks of love with which he had parted from her, and to be absorbed in his own feelings. But she was too proud to show it. Eudora was not a girl to throw herself at the head of any man, and finding he did not require her assistance, she returned to her seat and took up her work again, without making any further attempt to attract his notice.

“Oh! yes! I got the liniment,” he answered, carelessly, as he drew a small packet from his breast pocket, and examined it by the candle light before he delivered it over to her charge. “Camphor liniment, for outward application only,” he read



aloud, as he sent the phial, enveloped in white paper, rolling to her end of the table.

Eudora caught it in her hand.

"How beautifully chemists always wrap up their parcels," she said, admiring; "such nice white paper, and red sealing-wax, and such pretty blue string. It seems a shame to open it. And how wasteful Mrs Griffin would say they were," she continued, laughing, as she put the parcel unopened into her pocket.

At the allusion to Mrs Griffin's love of economy, Edgar Deane bit his lip.

"Yes!" he acquiesced, "it would serve for an hour's discourse from Aunt Deborah. My advice to you, Eudora, in consequence is, better not let her see it."

The tone of his voice roused her curiosity.

"What is the matter?" she asked again; "have you had any quarrel with your aunt?"

Then it was his turn to be alarmed.

your remark that induced mine. We both know what her weakness is, bless her, but *I* am the last person in the world to complain of it since all she saves is to come to me."

"Yes," said Eudora, gratefully, "it is all for *you*, Edgar, and the thought of that will make me bear patiently with anything she may say or do to her life's end. And she has been so kind to me to-day—so kind and gentle—it seemed almost as if she had guessed our secret."

"Has she? I am glad of that," replied Edgar, uneasily. "And how is the old lady, Eudora? Well! I hope?"

"Oh! quite well, and strong as usual," said the girl, cheerfully. "I left her, not an hour ago, prepared to read that famous chapter in the Bible that never comes to an end."

"I wonder if she is asleep yet—or if I



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could see her and bid her good night," he said, thoughtfully.

"Shall I go and ask?"

"Yes! do, dear! It seems strange to me now to go to bed without having kissed Aunt Deborah."

Eudora passed him on her way upstairs, and smiled admiringly. How good it was of him to think so tenderly of an old woman. He drew her towards him, and seemed as though he were about to kiss her. But, with a sudden impulse, he changed his intention to an answering smile, and turned his eyes again towards the table.

Eudora's heart sunk—she hardly knew why. She walked upstairs more soberly than she had felt disposed to do, and crept softly to the door of Mrs Griffin's room. It stood ajar; the sign that Barthomew had gone down to the servants' hall to take her supper.

Eudora peeped quietly in. The night-

.....
of sherry and a plate of biscuits, was placed beside the bed ; on the pillow was laid Mrs Griffin's parchment-like countenance, enveloped in a frilled cap—looking hideous and ghastly in repose.

The girl crept silently downstairs again.

"She is asleep," she whispered, even at that distance ; " and Barthomolew is taking her supper. Mrs Griffin must have gone to bed earlier than usual to-night. What o'clock is it ? "

Edgar looked at his watch.

" Nine," he replied. " Well ! I am not sleepy, if Aunt Deborah is. Do you mean to run away and leave me alone, Eudora ? "

" Not if you would like me to remain," she said, with a shy smile.

" I should like you very much to remain. I want to talk to you about our future prospects. Ah ! Eudora ! I fear they are not so bright as they might be. Dear



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old Aunt Deborah may live for the next ten years."

"We will not let that make them less bright," returned the girl bravely; "we can never be quite unhappy, whilst we love each other, Edgar. And you forget my father! If he is a rich man, perhaps he will help us."

"I don't think that he *can* be rich, dear," said Edgar Deane; "indeed, from what my aunt has told me, I am *sure* he is not."

Eudora's face fell.

"That is a pity," she said; "but never mind, Edgar; something may happen to help us; something may turn up when we least expect it. We never know what a day will bring forth."

The young man's face grew positively alarmed.

"Don't say that," he gasped. "I don't like to hear it. We must trust to ourselves, Eudora. Nothing else is likely to help us. How could it? But we will

--- J. C. ---
“Surely!” she answered, with a smile of perfect faith in their mutual powers of waiting.

“I will go upstairs and change my boots,” he said, presently. “I shall find you here on my return.”

“I will not stir till you come back,” cried Eudora, as he left the room.

She heard him mount the stairs with the utmost caution, lest he should disturb the slumbers of Mrs Griffin; and thought, with a glow of pleasure, what a friend and companion his feeling heart would prove to her through life. And in a very few minutes—not more than ten—he was by her side again in his every-day suit. Yet he did not seem much inclined for conversation, but sat in his old place, silent and absorbed, leaning his head upon his hand.

“You are ill? you have a headache?” said Eudora, compassionately.

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"Yes! I have a headache," he confessed at last. "I have had it all the day. Come and sit near me, Eudora, and put your cool hands upon my forehead. The sense of your presence and companionship will do me more good than anything else could have the power to do."



CHAPTER V.

“SHE HAS BEEN POISONED !”

EUDORA drew near, and did as he desired, but the rest of that evening did not pass as happily as she had hoped it would. Either Edgar was really ill, or something had tended greatly to depress his spirits. He never mentioned the future, which he had promised to discuss with her, nor did he indulge in any of the acts or words of love, which his professions of the afternoon might have led her to expect.

On the contrary, he sat still, moody, and dejected, only pressing Eudora's hand

convulsively, as some unpleasant thought apparently passed through his mind, or waking up with an occasional start, to remember that he had pledged himself to be agreeable.

"This is really not fair to you," he said, when half-an-hour had passed away in utter silence. "I asked you to sit up with me, and now I don't seem to have a word to say for myself."

"You are tired, and your head aches," replied Eudora, kindly. "Why should you exert yourself to talk if you do not feel inclined for it? Don't mind me, Edgar, I am quite happy if you are."

"I think I *am* over tired," he said. "That confounded cob shakes me to pieces. It would be easier to ride in a waggon. Has Aunt Deborah been talking of me to you this afternoon, Eudora? Did she miss me at dinner-time?"

"No," replied the girl, frankly; "I don't think she mentioned your name. But I

say just now I fancied she had guessed our secret) that I was a good girl, and some day I should be a rich woman like herself. And how could I become a rich woman, Edgar, except—except—”

She meant, except by marrying him, but she was too shy to finish the sentence, and quite expected he would take it out of her mouth. But he did no such thing. His mind caught at once the true meaning of Mrs Griffin's prophecy, and his teeth clenched at the revelation.

“She said that, did she?” he muttered, fiercely; and then recalling himself, he continued in a lighter strain. “Poor old auntie! She is very fond of you, Eudora, and so she may well be. What would she do without your kind eyes to see what she cannot see for herself, and your young arm for her crutch at any moment of the day? She would be lost without you.”

"She has *you*," murmured Eudora.

"Ah! I am well enough, but a man can never be the same assistance to an old lady as a girl. I should not wonder if Aunt Deborah has, as you surmise, guessed our little secret, and thinks favourably of it. Did you give her any hint on the subject, Eudora?"

"Oh! no! no! How *could* I?"

"I shall, before many days are over our heads; and I should not be surprised to find it was for that very purpose we were brought together. It will be very nice if our wishes tally with her's—will it not? I shall be twice as proud of my choice if Aunt Deborah approves of it, and then—when the time comes for all this to be ours, Eudora, what a lot of pleasure I will buy for my darling with it."

"We mustn't think of that—it is too far off," she murmured.

"Yes! yes! so it is; and, after all, the present is happiness enough for me. Hark! is that a noise upstairs?"

and thought how pale it looked by the flickering candlelight. "I heard no noise," she reiterated; "but, Edgar, you look really ill, to me. I am sure it would be better for you to go to bed."

"Yes! yes!" he answered, as he passed his handkerchief across his brow; "I think I will go, Eudora, for my head aches so badly. I am unfit for conversation."

They rose together, and Edgar put his arms round the girl and kissed her, almost roughly.

"Do you ever pray for me?" he demanded, abruptly.

"Always! I have prayed for you ever since I knew you," she replied, half frightened at his manner.

He did not thank her, nor embrace her again, but passed into the hall, and, seizing his candlestick, strode up the staircase and

was lost to view before Eudora, having first put away her working materials, stole after him to the upper storey. The old house was very quiet as she did so. Mrs Griffin, ever active and energetic, went to bed so early, and waked up so soon, that her servants were glad to get to rest, in order to prepare themselves for the morning's labour. The cook slept downstairs, but Barthomolew occupied a sofa-bedstead in her mistress's room. Eudora crept softly past the door lest she should disturb its occupants, and entering the meagre apartment which was called her own, was soon undressed and fast asleep. It is true that the remembrance of Edgar's fitful state of mind and manner somewhat depressed her; it is true that, as she knelt to offer up her evening prayer, the tears flowed when she came to his name, still her thoughts of him were not unhappy ones, and, having commended him to the care of Providence, she believed that all would be well with the morrow,

There is a period in our lives when the heaviest grief will hardly keep us waking ; we may sink to slumber with the undried tears upon our face ; we may sob and murmur through the livelong night, but still we have the happy power of losing consciousness, and gaining strength to bear the next day's trial. It is an unfortunate epoch in our lives when this power first deserts us. It is the line of demarcation between our hopeful youth and hopeless manhood ; it is the turning point that teaches us there is no cure for human ill except the grave. Eudora had not yet reached the boundary line when she must part company with hope. She was hugging it close to her heart as she fell asleep that night, and dreamed of Edgar Deane and herself wandering hand-in-hand through a garden of roses, amongst which she could not see one thorn. And Mrs Griffin was there too ; not grim and

stingy, but smiling on them like some beneficent godmother in a fairy tale, and dispensing gifts from a never-failing cornucopia, on the right hand and the left.

Eudora's sleep was one long happy dream, from the moment she laid her head upon her pillow till the grey dawn peeped in at her uncurtained window and mingled with the sickly yellow light of a candle flaring right in her eyes, and—what was this? A voice, frightened and unsteady, calling on her to wake, and listen, and understand—

"Miss Eudora! Miss Eudora! *do* wake up. I want your help, my dear. Do try to rouse yourself and listen to me!"

Eudora turned in her bed, opened her eyes, and sat up, in the dazed, bewildered manner in which people act and talk when their spirits are suddenly called back from the summer-land to reinhabit their mental cells.

"Who is it?" she said, rubbing her eyes, and then opening them with an effort.

“It isn’t morning, miss, but you must get up all the same, please, for Mrs Griffin’s very ill.”

“Very ill,” repeated Eudora, thoroughly roused by the intelligence. “What is it? When did it happen?”

“I can’t stay to tell you nothing now, miss,” cried the servant, hastily; “I only left her to call you. Please get up as soon as you can, for I’m frightened to death to be alone with her. I’m afraid she’s dying.”

With these words, Barthomolew rushed from the room, and Eudora, thoroughly scared, leapt from her bed, and having thrown on her things as well as her trembling fingers would permit her, hurried to Mrs Griffin’s apartment. The scene that presented itself to her, was worse than anything she had anticipated. The poor old woman appeared to be at her last gasp. She was seated in her chair, supported in

Barthomolew's arms, her withered face drawn, blue, pinched and ghastly.

"Oh! what is it?" cried Eudora, as this deplorable sight met her view.

"I'm sure I can't tell you, miss, but she's very bad indeed. She's been vomiting, to my belief, for the last two hours, but you know what the mistress is, she won't let me do a thing for her that she thinks she can do herself, and she'd been up and about ever so long before I heard her. But she's fairly beat now, and can't lift hand nor foot, and she looks mortal bad to me."

"We must have the doctor," said Eudora.
"Mr Deane must go at once for Mr Onslow."

At this intimation, Mrs Griffin strove to raise her hand in opposition, but it fell powerless by her side, and the vomiting recommenced.

"Never mind what she thinks, miss," said Barthomolew; "it's a matter of life and death with her, and you must send for Dr Onslow at once."

Edgar! Edgar! are you awake?

"Edgar! Edgar! are you awake? You must get up at once, please, and run for Dr Onslow. Poor Mrs Griffin is very ill indeed."

"I am coming," said his voice, in reply, and in another moment he had unbolted his door, and stood fully dressed before her.

"Haven't you been to bed?" she asked, in her surprise.

"No!—yes!—that is to say, I *did* go to bed, but I got up when I heard Barthomew stirring, as I guessed something must be the matter, and thought I might be required."

"Oh! that was very good of you, dear Edgar. Yes! indeed, you must go at once, and bring Dr Onslow to see her. She is very ill."

"Not seriously so, I hope," he said, with white lips.

"I don't know. I cannot tell," replied the girl, half crying, "but she is in great pain, and we are very frightened. Go as quickly as ever you can, Edgar, and bring him back with you."

"I will run all the way," he answered, as he flew downstairs, and out at the hall door.

"It is all right," said Eudora, as she returned to the sick-room; "Mr Deane has run to fetch the doctor, and we shall have him here directly."

"Well, I hope he may be able to do something for her, miss," replied Barthomew; "but I doubt it! I don't like her looks at all."

No one could have liked them at that moment. The poor old lady, evidently in the severest pain, was sitting crumpled up in her chair, whilst the vomit she had become too feeble to expel was running in a thin stream mixed with blood from her lips.

... said Edgema. Can it be any-
thing she has eaten, Barthomolew?"

"I'm sure I can't tell, miss. It looks like cholery morbies to me; but Dr Onslow will know at once. There she go again, poor dear! Lor'! it brings my heart up in my mouth to see her."

Thus the two women hung over her, horror-stricken, but impotent to afford the slightest relief, until they heard the hall-door clang, and men's footsteps ascending the stairs.

"Thank heaven! here's the doctor, though I guess he comes too late," cried Barthomolew, as Dr Onslow and Edgar Deane entered the room together.

Mrs Griffin was by that time in the last stage of collapse. Her eyes were fixed; her body cold and pulseless; and the faintest of breaths issued at long intervals from her leaden-coloured lips. The doctor felt her pulse, and moved the



lighted candle backwards and forwards over her staring eyeballs.

“ Why didn’t you send for me before ? ” was his first question, as he replaced the light upon the table.

“ I sent as soon as ever I knew the mistress was ill, sir,” replied Barthomolew ; “ but she is so self-willed, she won’t never wake me to do anything for her as she can do for herself, and I believe she must have been up an hour or more before I heard her stirring.”

“ What did she have to eat yesterday ? ” he asked abruptly.

“ Very little, sir, and all of the plainest. Gruel, and bread and butter, and a little minced rabbit and pudding. Nothing as could do her any possible harm.”

“ Well ! she must have taken something to do her harm. *She’s been poisoned !* ”

At this announcement his listeners were thrown into the utmost consternation. Edgar Deane sat down suddenly, with

then burst into tears; and Barthomolew gave a wild shriek, that made even the dying woman stir uneasily.

"Stop that noise," said Dr Onslow, authoritatively; "you will only disturb her last moments by it. I can do her no good now. I doubt if I could, even had I been called in from the first. Her age is greatly against her. But a few moments will see it ended. Let her go in peace."

He took his stand by Mrs Griffin as he spoke, and kept his finger on her pulse.

"*Poisoned!*" said Barthomolew, under her breath. "Then she must have done it herself, poor lady, for I'm sure no one else did."

"What are all those bottles there?" asked Dr Onslow, nodding his head in the direction of the chest of drawers.

"They are the poor mistress's medicines, what she was in the habit of taking," replied the servant.

"Let none of them be touched. Let *nothing* in this room be touched, until I have seen and examined it. Mind you understand me! Your neglect in this particular may lead to serious consequences for yourself."

"You may depend on me, sir. I won't come within half-a-mile of anything here."

At this juncture, the dying woman began to move restlessly in her last throes.

"Mr Deane," said the doctor, "you can do no good here. Will you be kind enough to take Miss Thane from the room. These scenes are not advisable for a young lady's eyes. As soon as any change occurs I will let you know."

Edgar rose mechanically from his seat, and walked from the apartment, whither, as in duty bound, Eudora followed him.

"Oh, Edgar, isn't it terrible?" she exclaimed, as soon as they found themselves

good?"

"I am afraid so," he replied. "Onslow is not a man to have spoken so decidedly had he not been sure. For my own part, I feel we shall never see her again. My dear, dear old aunt."

"But *poisoned*, Edgar! think of her being *poisoned*! How *could* it have happened? *Who* could have done it?"

"Don't *speak* of it—don't *think* of it," rejoined the young man, with a shudder, as he again hid his face in his hands.

They were still brooding, separately and silently, over the shock they had incurred, when Dr Onslow entered the room.

"It is all over," he said, as their inquiring eyes met his. "She went very quietly—there was no further pain—she was too far gone when I arrived to feel any more." Then he drew a chair near

Edgar's, and sat down. "This is a very serious matter, I am sorry to say, Mr Deane," he continued, "a matter for magisterial inquiry. There is no doubt the poor lady has been poisoned, and we cannot escape an inquest."

"*Escape!*" cried Edgar, loudly, "who wants to escape it, sir? If my dear aunt has come by her death in the way you suppose, there cannot be too rigorous an inquiry made into the cause of it. But she was so good, so generous, so liberal. Who could have found the motive for so detestable a crime? It is incomprehensible to me."

"And I am powerless to help you out of your difficulty," said the doctor; "but we shall doubtless learn more at the coroner's inquest. My own idea is—from what the servant tells me of her habits—that she took it herself in mistake for some medicine. Was Mrs Griffin in the habit of using laurel water, Miss Thane?"

MRS.

"Laurel water! Dr Onslow! I think not! I never heard of such a thing."

"I suppose you had access to those phials on the chest of drawers?"

"I have dusted and arranged them sometimes."

"And you never saw 'laurel water' amongst them?"

"Not that I remember. But they are not all labelled. Many of them were washed before their present contents were put in them. But Mrs Griffin knew what they contained."

"I have taken possession of whatever I thought necessary," continued the doctor, turning to Edgar Deane, "and have placed my seal upon the rest. I trust to you, as the nearest relation to the deceased, to see that nothing in her room is touched or taken away. I shall have to give my evidence at the inquest, and yours, and that

of this young lady will also be required ; but I will see that it is all got over as quietly as possible, for I have not the slightest doubt in my own mind how this sad accident has occurred."

"If it has come about through the carelessness of that woman Barthomolew!" exclaimed Edgar, bringing his fist down upon the table.

"Softly, softly, my good sir," interposed Dr Onslow ; "we have no right to judge beforehand, even by a supposition. For my own part, I believe no one is to blame. But I must leave you now, and I will make arrangements for the inquiry to take place as early and as privately as possible. Good-day, Mr Deane. Good-day, Miss Thane. You have my sincerest sympathy on this sad occasion," — with which the doctor, anxious for his breakfast and his bath, bowed himself out of the room.

Edgar and Eudora sat where he had left them, silent and weeping. They could

gone away from them for ever, and that her last moments had been such sad and painful ones. Poor old lady! how often they had thought her a trouble and a nuisance, and how gladly now would they have received a summons to do anything for her, however disagreeable and unpalatable. But that was the worst of it. In all their lives, however long they lasted, Mrs Griffin would never require them to sacrifice their own wishes to her's again. Eudora was quietly weeping over the idea, when she was aroused by Edgar's voice.

"I suppose I ought to write and tell Mr Overton," he said. "He was poor auntie's best friend, and is entitled to the earliest information. And your father, too, Eudora. He must, of course, be told of this sad event."

Eudora started. Hitherto she had been thinking only of Mrs Griffin. Now she

was forced to think of herself. Her father must be written to. And what changes would follow this saddest change of all? Would her father come and take her away from the manor house—from Edgar Deane—from all which she now felt was dearest to her in the world?"

"My father!" she gasped. "Oh! he will come here—he will take me home with him! Oh, Edgar, what will become of me?"

Her frightened eyes met his, but though his were scared and frightened too, as if he had seen a phantom in the morning light, they met her's steadily.

"*What will become of you?*" he answered. "Can you ask me such a question? You *know* what will become of you!"—and Eudora's heart went to sleep again beneath that look.



CHAPTER VI.

“ IS THERE ANYTHING BETWEEN YOU ? ”

THE coroner's inquest on the remains of the mistress of the manor house was conducted (as the doctor had promised the survivors) as quietly and privately as possible. These matters are usually more than half arranged out of court, and the confirmed opinion of so reliable a practitioner as Dr Onslow that the deceased woman had come to her death by self-accident had its due weight in rendering the necessary formalities as brief as was consistent with justice.

In fact, Eudora Thane, who had been dreading the inquiry as a terrible ordeal, was surprised to find how simply and naturally it seemed to pass off. A few strangers assembled in the dining-room, and busied themselves with pen and ink and paper, and she, and Edgar, and Barthomolew were summoned in turn, to answer such questions as might be put to them, and then quietly dismissed, with a word of thanks.

The servant's testimony went further to convince the jury that Dr Onslow's opinion of the case was a correct one than any other. She gave witness boldly to the fact that her late mistress always physicked herself, and would not allow a doctor in the house ; that she asserted the members of the medical profession to be a lot of blundering fools, who knew nothing of their business, and she would rather die than owe her life to one of them ; that she had been in the daily habit of swallowing small doses from one or

herself seriously ill by taking camphor liniment, in mistake for sal-volatile. Barthomolew had never heard of, nor seen, such a thing as "laurel water." She did not even know it by name, but neither did she know the name of half the mixtures Mrs Griffin kept in her phials, and it had been as much as her life was worth to touch one of them. When asked if she did not think it very dangerous to keep medicines in unlabelled bottles, she replied that she had remonstrated with her mistress again and again on the subject, and had only been told to hold her tongue for her pains. She further stated, on an inquiry from the coroner, that Mrs Griffin never went to bed without a decanter of sherry by her bedside, and she had known her on several occasions, when unable to rest, to get up in the night and mix a sleeping draught with her wine. Miss Eudora (so Barthomolew concluded)

was as well acquainted as herself with this custom of the late Mrs Griffin.

Miss Eudora Thane, on being called, blushed very deeply, and trembled like a leaf, but gave her evidence clearly, nevertheless. She found it rather difficult, poor child, to satisfy the coroner as to her identity, until Dr Onslow came to her assistance, and told him to put her down as a ward of the deceased lady. Eudora could truly confirm all that Barthomolew had said about Mrs Griffin's strict orders concerning her array of phials, and the accuracy with which she seemed to know the contents of each bottle. Eudora could not understand her making a mistake about her medicines, still, in the night time, it was very possible. She, too, had never heard the mention of "laurel water"—but on being asked if she had heard Mrs Griffin say that she possessed asaceftida, or hydrate of chloral—both of which had been discovered amongst the unlabelled bottles

the coroner inquired where she had been, and what she had been doing, on the evening of her guardian's death, and glanced at Edgar Deane, with such crimsoned cheeks, as made some of the jury-men smile. But all they elicited from her only tended to strengthen the general opinion. Each answer brought forward some fresh trait of the deceased woman's obstinate and avaricious disposition, which prevented her taking or seeking for proper advice.

Edgar Deane was, of course, one of the most closely catechised witnesses. It was well known that this young gentleman was the dead woman's reputed heir, and the person likely to receive most benefit from her death. But if the jury expected to confuse him, in consequence, by their searching inquiries, they were very much mistaken. His demeanour was sad and subdued, but far less nervous than that of



either of the women, and he gave his evidence in a calm, straightforward manner, that made a favourable impression on all present. He could not testify as accurately as the former witnesses to what went on in his late aunt's bedroom, but he was well aware of her dislike to the presence of medical men, and remembered the occasion alluded to by the servant, when she had half poisoned herself with liniment, and would not allow him to send for Dr Onslow, although she had suffered for days in consequence of not procuring proper advice. When asked if he were not the person most likely to derive benefit from her decease, Edgar Deane slightly elevated his eyebrows, and asked the coroner to repeat the question. On hearing it a second time, he quietly replied that, had not his aunt's sudden demise made him feel rather indifferent (for the time being) to worldly things, he should have said that he was sorry he was not.

him so ; but he was equally sure that he had not the first claim upon her. Being asked how he knew that, he answered, in a voice becomingly broken with sad remembrance, that on the very day she died he had had a long conversation with her on the subject, when she had expressed herself so pleased with his conduct that—that—

“Take your time, Mr Deane,” observed the coroner, feelingly ; “we have no wish to hurry you, but this is a matter of some importance.”

Mr Deane recovered himself with an effort, and went on steadily. He regretted he should have betrayed himself so openly, but his late aunt had always been so good and kind to him. She had been his second mother. She had told him, on the day in question, that she was not satisfied with what she had done for him, and that she intended to alter her will in his favour—

meaning, he believed, to cancel bequests that she had made to other people; and she had directed him in consequence to write a letter for her to her solicitors, requesting them to visit her as soon as possible at the manor house, and bring her will with them.

"What is the name of the firm of the late Mrs Griffin's solicitors?" inquired a jurymen.

"Messrs Peveril and Pomfrey."

"And was the letter you speak of posted, Mr Deane?"

"I do not know. I spent the afternoon out of doors, and did not see my poor aunt again until she was taken ill."

"Have you communicated with Messrs Peveril and Pomfrey since Mrs Griffin's death?"

"Yes; I telegraphed the intelligence to them yesterday, and they will be down here to-morrow."

"Very good, Mr Deane. We do not require you any further."

from Walshott, were the next to give their evidence, which was sufficient to terminate the whole business. There was not the least doubt that the deceased had died from the administration of laurel water. Laurel water had been found in her vomit—in her intestines—in the remains of sherry in her glass—and in an unlabelled phial on the chest of drawers. This fact, coupled with the evidence given as to her habits of dosing herself, and of mixing her medicines with her sherry—and with the circumstances of her age—the time of night at which the accident took place—and the facility with which an old purblind woman might mistake one bottle for another, left not the slightest doubt on the doctors' minds that her death had resulted from a mistake, for which no one was to blame but herself. The testimony of the medical men was so convincing, that it concluded the



case at once. A verdict of "death from misadventure" was unanimously recorded, and the coroner's jury took up their hats, and having bowed awkwardly to the assembly, shuffled one after another out of the room. The Reverend Thomas Overton, the clergyman of the parish, who had also been called upon to bear his testimony to the parsimony and obstinacy of the deceased, was the last to remain, after all had departed.

"I want to speak to you, Mr Deane," he said, as the house was once more clear.

Edgar started, and turned pale.

"Forgive me if I ask you to put off what you wish to say till another time," he answered, nervously. "I am sufficiently upset by what I have already had to go through to-day."

"I have no wish to upset you further, Mr Deane, but it is imperative that you should listen to me for a moment. You must be aware that Miss Thane cannot

her father, and, until he arrives in Holy-oak, it will be best for her to return to the parsonage with me."

"Just as you like," replied Edgar, indifferently. "I suppose Eudora has no objection to it."

Eudora, who was standing by, was disappointed by his answer. That he should wish her to go away, and at such a moment, seemed terrible to her.

"Oh! no! Edgar; let me stay with you!" she cried, impulsively. "What will you do in this dismal house all by yourself? It will be so lonely, and so—so horrible," she added, with a shudder.

"Nonsense! of what do you suppose I should be afraid," he said, almost roughly; then in a softer tone—"you will do well to accept Mr Overton's kind offer, Eudora, for, as he says, you can hardly stay here, and it will not be for long—remember—not for long!"

His eyes met hers as he pronounced the words, and Mr Overton read their meaning, and was sorry for it. He did not like Edgar Deane; he had never done so from the beginning, and he thought Eudora Thane one of the sweetest girls he had ever seen. Any fate would be better for her (so he decided with himself) than to become the mistress of the manor house. The discovery he imagined he had made affected his temper.

"Come, Eudora," he said, abruptly; "it is no question of what you wish or do not wish to do. I have Mr Thane's authority to take you to the parsonage, until he has decided on some other home for you. Madge and Nelly are ready to receive you, and we will make you as welcome as it is in our power to do, until your father's wishes respecting you are known."

"Will my father come down to see me?" asked Eudora, half frightened.

"I think it more than likely, but as yet

from him, still I have no doubt he will be present at the funeral! Mrs Griffin was one of his oldest friends."

"And then," said Eudora, lifting her wet eyes, like dewy violets, to Edgar's face, "then—you will tell him, Edgar?"

"Yes! yes! I will tell him," rejoined the young man hastily.

The girl turned away with a sigh. His aunt's death seemed to have driven everything else out of Edgar's head. Still her fond heart could find excuses for him.

"He is very sad," she whispered to Mr Overton, as she passed out of the room; "he has such a kind, loving heart, and this terrible shock has been enough to upset anyone. Perhaps *I* do not appear so grateful for your kindness as I ought to do, but indeed I feel it. It was only the thought of leaving him alone till the funeral that made me hesitate."

"Under any circumstances, you could

not have remained here, my dear," he answered, kindly ; " but put on your walking things at once, and let Barthomolew send what you may require after you. My little maids will be waiting dinner if I stay away much longer."

It was a melancholy walk that Eudora and Mr Overton took together through the fields that day on their way to the parsonage. They had traversed half the distance in silence, occupied with their several thoughts when the girl was startled from her reverie by a straightforward question.

" Eudora ! is there anything between you and Edgar Deane ? "

She did not know what to answer. She could have told herself well enough, but to tell another was a different thing. She began rapidly to revolve in her own mind whether there *were* anything between them—any engagement—any binding promise—any certainty to take hold of and bring forward in proof of the legality of those

“I — I — don’t quite know what you mean,” she stammered.

“Are you engaged to be married to Mr Deane? Don’t think me impertinent, my dear, but it is right that I should know.”

“Not exactly,” she answered, hanging her head; “that is, we have never spoken of marriage together. How could we? There was no hope of it.”

“But you have spoken of love, I suppose, and—and—you like him, Eudora.”

“Yes! I like him,” she whispered, with an averted face.

Mr Overton sighed.

“Very well, my dear! that is all! Don’t distress yourself by telling me any more. If you do like each other, and your father gives his consent, there will be no obstacle now to your marriage with him. Mr Deane will soon be one of the richest men in the county.”

"Yes! we knew we couldn't marry till Mrs Griffin died. He always said so," replied Eudora, simply.

Yet, though she did not know how she could have avoided answering his questions without telling an untruth, Eudora felt very uncomfortable after that interview with Mr Overton. She wished he had not asked her such a thing. It was Edgar whom he should have questioned on the subject. She was afraid that she had done wrong in being the first to reveal their secret, and she longed to be able to confide in her lover and receive his assurance to the contrary.

But for the next few days she did not see nor hear from him. It was not decorous that he should walk about before the funeral took place, and Mr Overton told her that Messrs Peveril and Pomfrey were at the manor house, monopolising all his time with the arrangement of the affairs of the deceased. Nelly and Madge Overton

state, that prevented her deriving comfort from anything. All she longed for was the advent of her father. Hitherto she had dreaded his visits, but her fear had vanished. For the events of the last few days had changed Eudora from a child to a woman, and she had determined that, on the first opportunity, she would insist upon Mr Thane telling her the truth about herself. It was no longer of no consequence to anybody who or what she might be. She was about to become Edgar Deane's wife, and she would not let him marry a woman whose origin was hidden in a cloud of mystery. So love made her bold, and though it was with a fast beating heart that on the day before the funeral she heard her father had arrived and was waiting for her in the drawing-room, she went down to meet him with a firm step, and a mind resolved to have its own way.



Mr Thane received his daughter with more cordiality than he had usually displayed towards her. Selfish, unprincipled, and heartless, he had been content to leave his motherless child to the care of strangers, and had little concerned himself whether she was happy or unhappy at the manor house, so long as her existence did not trouble him. And the news of Mrs Griffin's sudden death had considerably upset his equanimity. Her parsimony had rendered her willing to accept the onerous charge of another person's child, but everyone might not be so willing to adopt a grown young woman for so moderate a remuneration. Mr Thane had puzzled his brain for the last week to decide what possible arrangement he could make for Eudora in the future, but a few hints from Mr Overton, before he met his daughter, had set his mind at rest upon the matter.

To see her installed as mistress of the manor house would relieve him at once

man had cautioned him not to allude to so delicate a subject before Edgar Deane had formally broached it to him, he could not prevent the knowledge showing its effect upon his manner. Mr Thane was, moreover, not only pleased but startled at the improvement in his daughter's appearance. He had not seen her now for ten months, and her charms had ripened so visibly that he was no longer surprised to hear that she had gained a lover in the interval. Indeed, as she came forward, with the vivid colour mantling in her cheeks, and her purple eyes half raised shyly to his own, she recalled to him so palpably a vision of the past, that the selfish man of the world felt a tug at his heart-strings that he had not experienced for many a long day.

"My dear child," he said, almost affectionately, as Eudora came up to him,

"I was not prepared to find you had made such rapid strides since we last met. You are a woman—positively a woman—and a very handsome woman into the bargain, by Jove!"

If she was handsome, she had certainly not inherited her beauty from him, for Mr Thane was more than ugly. He was actually mean-looking in appearance. But notwithstanding his disadvantages of height and feature, he bore the impress of a thorough gentleman. Eudora had never been able to decide in her own mind what it was that made her father look superior to other men—even to Edgar Deane, with all his beauty—although he had grey hair, and a large nose, and small eyes. It was the stamp that high breeding and the mixture in good society invariably leave upon a man (never mind how steeped he may be in secret vices), which the girl saw, although she was too ignorant to recognise it by its real name. But she felt its power

and the polish of his pronunciation.

"I am glad you approve of me, papa," she said, shyly; "but I am afraid I am not looking my best. This has been a sad week for all of us, and I seem to have had no time to think of myself or my appearance."

"Naturally, my dear. It would have been unbecoming on your part to do so. You have lost an excellent friend in poor Mrs Griffin, Eudora, and so, for that matter, have I. Indeed, I don't know how we shall replace her. She has watched over you like a mother. We may wait a long time before I can settle you so comfortably again."

"Yes, she was always good to me, in her way," replied the girl; "but surely, papa, I am getting past the need of such care. I am no longer a child who requires looking after. Am I to be put out to nurse all my life, like an overgrown baby?"

Mr Thane laughed uneasily.

"Hardly, my dear! and doubtless such a pretty girl as you are will find a home for herself before long. But, for the present, I must say there are obstacles in the way. If you were still a child there would be none. It is your womanhood that makes it difficult for me to place you comfortably."

"But why can't I live at home with you?" suggested Eudora, timidly; "other girls do! When will you think me old enough, papa, to keep house for you?"

Mr Thane looked still more uneasy.

"If age were all that were desirable in the matter, my dear, you would be quite old enough now; for, as I remarked before, you are a woman, and a deucedly handsome one into the bargain. But my establishment is such as I could hardly take you to—indeed it would be impossible. I cannot explain these matters to you, Eudora, but you must be content to accept them as they are, and to believe that I

shall be under the necessity of putting you in the charge of some lady, who will act as your chaperon, in the place of Mrs Griffin."

Eudora looked very downcast at this announcement.

"I have never had anything in my life explained to me," she said, sorrowfully. "I have been compelled to accept everything, as it were, blindfold. I spoke to Mrs Griffin about it constantly, and she always told me to ask you. And if we are to be separated again, papa, and I am to have another home amongst strangers, I think—I think you ought to tell me the truth before I go."

"What is it you desire to know?" demanded Mr Thane, with somewhat of a frown upon his countenance.

"First and foremost, all about my mother. What was her name? when did

she die? how old was I when she left me? And have you no portrait of her, papa—nothing to show me by which I may recognise her, when we meet again? Oh! I cannot tell you how strange it seems to me that everybody should know more about my mother than her own child does."

Mr Thane turned his back to his daughter, and looked out of the parsonage window.

"Eudora! you have touched upon a very tender subject! You might have guessed that from the silence I have maintained concerning it; nor have I believed that it would add to your happiness to hear the story of your birth. But, since there are certain facts you seem anxious to ascertain, I have no objection to enlighten you. Your mother's maiden name was Eudora Ainsley, and she died when you were a few weeks old. I have no portrait of her that I can show you, but if you look in the glass, you will see what she was like. And—and I would

“Then you loved her, papa!” cried Eudora, impulsively; “you loved my poor mother, who left us both so early—”

“Yes! yes! have I not said so?” replied Mr Thane, in a nervous voice.

The girl clasped her hands together, and regarded him with the utmost compassion.

“Oh! why did you not let me comfort you years ago!” she exclaimed. “Why did you not take me home, papa—not to fill *her* place, for I know I could never do that—but just that I might have tried to make you feel less lonely and sorrowful? Why cannot I do so now? Why cannot I go back with you to be your housekeeper—your servant—anything you like to make me—so that you may not feel that my dear mother’s loss has left you quite desolate?”

In her new-born sympathy with her



father's supposed regret, Eudora forgot her former fear of him, and became quite brave. But Mr Thane drew more and more into himself.

"My dear—you do not know—I cannot tell you," he replied, as he shuffled up and down the room. "There are circumstances—in fact, your poor mamma was not friends with her own family when she died, and they do not even know of your existence—and—well, have a little patience, Eudora, a little patience, and you shall hear the whole story from beginning to end."

"I am afraid it is a very sad story," she answered, as the light of expectation died out of her eyes, "or everybody would not be so unwilling to speak of it."

"Death is always sad, my dear," replied Mr Thane, evasively. "I know your poor mother's left me sad enough. For years it was the trouble of my life. But let us talk of something more cheerful, Eudora. What is this young man like —

well-bred—a person to be ashamed or proud of ?”

“Oh ! not ashamed, papa !” cried the girl, with a vivid blush. “Edgar—that is, Mr Deane—is everything in appearance and manners that one could wish. And he is very kind too, very, *very* kind.”

“That is well,” rejoined her father. “And the place, Eudora, you like Holyoak, do you not ? and you have friends here ?”

“Yes ! a few ! Madge, and Nelly, and Mr Overton are always kind to me ; and there is a Mrs Gerome, living in Honey-suckle Cottage, who has been a real friend to me. She wanted me to go and stay with her when Mrs Griffin died, and I should have done so, if Mr Overton had not brought me here.”

“There was no necessity, my dear, and I preferred your being with the Overtons. Indeed, if you are comfortable with them,

I see no reason why the parsonage should not remain your home, at all events for the present."

Eudora looked up and smiled; the idea pleased her. The parsonage was near the manor house. To remain with the Overtons was to remain near Edgar, until such time as she should be with him always.

"I should like it better than anything else—except going home with you, papa," she said quickly.

"Then I will speak to Overton about it," replied Mr Thane. A few hours later he had fulfilled his promise.

"If you have no objection to keeping her, Overton," he said, in reference to Eudora, "it would be a great convenience to me to leave her here until such time as matters shall be arranged between her and young Deane. She seems attached to your daughters, and anxious to remain near them."

"We shall only be too pleased to keep her," said the other. "Eudora is and

But, pardon me, do you intend to leave her for ever in ignorance of her birth? She is very curious on the subject, and is not a girl to be put off with quibbles. And with respect to Mr Deane, I think it will be your bounden duty to tell him the truth before matters are finally settled between them."

"If Deane is told, is it necessary that the girl should hear the story also? It is sure to make an awkwardness between us for the future."

"Perhaps it may, but that will be preferable to further deception. Eudora has now arrived at an age when it is cruel not to tell her the secret of her birth. She has a very proud nature, Mr Thane, and if the truth should burst some day upon her without preparation, it will half kill her.

"If that is your opinion, Overton, you have my permission to enlighten her whenever you may think it advisable. But—but I should still wish, for the sake of

others, that the knowledge of my real name and station is concealed from her."

"Very good," replied Mr Overton, with a sigh. "I think myself that a confession of the whole truth would be the best policy, but it is for you to judge. Any way, with your permission, when the funeral is over, I will bruit the subject to Mr Deane, and the shock will come with less force on the poor child if it is coupled with the knowledge that it makes no difference to the feelings of her future husband."

"You think it *will* be a shock, then?"

"I am *sure* of it! Eudora is as proud as she is sensitive, and her utter unconsciousness of any wrong will render the task of breaking the intelligence to her a very painful one."

"It is very good of you to undertake it," replied Mr Thane, as he quickly turned the conversation into another channel.



CHAPTER VII.

“HE HAS MADE ME AN OUTCAST.”

HE funeral was over and Mr Thane was gone. He had pertinaciously avoided a *tête-à-tête* with his daughter during the remainder of his stay in Holyoak, and Eudora had noticed his reticence. But it had no power to annoy her. She was looking forward now with the lapse of every hour to seeing Edgar Deane enter the parsonage gate, and to hearing him repeat the assurance that her future was provided for, and all

she had to do was to commence a life of endless happiness with him. What was her unknown strange father to her, in comparison with this hope and promise of her young existence; what even the possible past of her dead mother, for whom she felt so tender a compassion.

She was curious on the subject still—curious, and a little wounded that she had been kept so long in the dark concerning her own history—but nothing more. Her mind was too much engrossed with Edgar Deane, and the remembrance of what he had said to her, to leave room for much beside her joyful anticipation of listening to the repetition of these words. Only, as Mr Thane bade her farewell, without any allusion to a speedy reunion, she ventured to remind him that he had not fulfilled his promise to tell her the story of her birth. And he had answered somewhat brusquely,

know, and then you can write and say what you like to me upon the subject."

So they had parted, and Eudora had come to the parson with the petition that she might hear everything that concerned herself.

Mr Overton looked very grave as he listened to the girl's request. At any time he would have shrunk from so unpleasant a mission, and he did so doubly now. For, at Mr Thane's desire, he had held an interview with Mrs Griffin's heir concerning Eudora, which had not been so satisfactory as they had both anticipated—which had resulted, in fact, in Mr Deane leaving Holyoak and going to London, without seeing Miss Thane again. Words and looks which Mr Overton had seen exchanged between these two, had

made him consider himself justified in speaking plainly of Eudora's future to Edgar Deane, but the young man had entirely refuted the idea that more than the ordinary expressions of friendship had passed between them.

From having been almost unnaturally dejected and despondent concerning his aunt's death, Mr Deane appeared to have rushed into the opposite extreme. The funeral and reading of the will, by which it became certain that he inherited the whole of the late Mrs Griffin's large property, seemed to have lifted some deadly weight off his shoulders, and his tone and manner became almost too jaunty and hilarious to be decorous.

Mr Overton, naturally, could do no more than hint at the understanding which he supposed to exist between the new-made master of the manor house and

him considerably, for the girl's sake.

Edgar Deane had not seen Eudora since she had taken up her abode at the parsonage, and, under the circumstances, he told Mr Overton, he thought he had better not.

"Naturally, my dear sir," he had concluded, briskly, "I have an immense amount of business on my mind at the present moment, and some which requires my immediate presence in London. I shall therefore leave Holyoak this afternoon. Will you give my love to Eudora, and say that I will write to her from town, and shall hope to see her again when I return to the manor? But, of course, the old place must be done up first. I couldn't live in it in the state it is in at present."

Mr Overton had been too much disgusted to prolong the interview, but he had determined that Eudora should hear of it on the first opportunity. He saw that his unexpected prosperity had brought out the character of Edgar Deane in its true colours, and he thought it the luckiest thing in the world for the girl that it should be so. He did not yet know the depth of her affections, nor the cruel hold that Edgar Deane's protestations of love had taken on her mind.

Mr Overton was ruminating in his study over the best method of breaking the news to her, when Eudora appeared before him to present her petition.

"Papa and I had a talk the other day about myself and about my mother, Mr Overton," she said, timidly, "and he told me that the subject was too painful an one for him to discuss with me, but

—that I may wish to know concerning it. And so I should like to hear, if you please—first, why my mother's name is never mentioned, and I have been brought up with Mrs Griffin ; and, secondly, why papa does not care to have me at home with him ? I think I have a right to know, for many reasons—and especially now that—that—”

She stopped there, blushing consciously, and Mr Overton read the meaning of her blush, and sighed.

“Yes, my dear child,” he said, “I think you are right, and that you have now arrived at an age when it would be needless and cruel to deceive you further. But it is a sad story, Eudora, and you will be none the happier for hearing it. I must prepare you for that—”

“I wish to know it, whatever it may be,”



she answered, firmly. "I feel it is sad, but—but, it will not make so much difference to me now, perhaps, as it would have done some time ago."

He did not comment on this second allusion to her prospects, but entered, with apparent irrelevance, on another subject.

"Is there much property belonging to you up at the manor house, my dear?"

"Oh, no! Mr Overton! very little; only my winter things and a few books."

"Will you go up there this morning and collect your possessions, and order the servants to see them sent down here? Mr Deane is not in Holyoak," he added, seeing the flush of anticipation that had mounted to Eudora's cheek; "he has been compelled to go to London on matters concerning his property. Wealth invariably brings its responsibilities with it, you know, my dear; but he told me to give you his love, and

LONDON.

"I should have liked to see him before he went," replied Eudora, in a subdued voice, that had a suspicion of tears in it, "but I suppose it was unavoidable."

"I suppose so too, and doubtless Mr Deane will explain the reason satisfactorily to you. Meanwhile, my dear, I wish you would go up to the manor house, and, on your return, I shall be at leisure to renew this conversation. At present, I must attend to some parish matters, that will occupy my whole morning."

He was anxious to cut every link that bound her to the manor house, before she heard the cruel intelligence it was his duty to impart, and that was why he made an excuse to send her on that errand before the explanation took place. Eudora went about it, slowly and sorrowfully. She did

not ask Madge or Nelly to accompany her to her late home: she did not even tell them she was going there; but stole out of the house, as quietly as a mouse, and took the solitary path through the fields that divided the parsonage from the manor.

As she traversed them, one idea only was in her mind. Edgar had left Holyoak without seeing her again! She thought it was inconsiderate and unkind of him to have done so, and she told herself that no amount of trouble could have driven her from his side—but further than this—that he had permitted his business to supersede for the moment his love for herself—not the slightest suspicion of his fidelity assailed her heart. She knew that he had loved his aunt, and grieved sincerely for her loss—and perhaps his sudden access to riches, from so melancholy a cause, had saddened instead of elating him—had made him feel that it

taught her to share with him.

Eudora brooded on this view of the case till she persuaded herself that Edgar was perfectly right, and long before she arrived at the manor house door she had freely forgiven her lover for preferring business to herself, and blamed her own folly for doubting for a moment that he knew what was best and right for both of them. Barthomolew received her with delight. Both she and the cook had felt very dull and lonely since the bustle and excitement of the funeral was over, and anxious to get away from a scene of which they had only waited to see the end.

“Lor’! Miss Eudora,” cried Barthomolew, as she opened the door, “what a comfort it is to see your face. I began to be afraid that, once quit of this gruesome



old place, you'd never put your foot in it again, for it hasn't been much of a home to you, miss, has it? But we did look out for you at the funeral—cook and me—and was quite surprised to find you weren't there."

"My papa came down to it, you know, Barthomolew, and he did not wish me to be present. But Mr Overton told me he saw you and cook. Poor Mrs Griffin! I can hardly believe even now that I shall never see nor speak to her again."

"Lor'! miss! that's certain enough, if nothing else is! And to think of Mr Edgar getting all the property—seven thousand a-year, they tell me, if there's a penny—and not even a mourning ring for you, miss. It beats me altogether."

"Oh! I had no claim upon Mrs Griffin, Barthomolew—none whatever. She was only my guardian. I never expected she would leave me anything. And Mr Deane

the best right of all to be her heir, and no one expected anything else."

"Well! I don't know, miss," replied the servant, pursing up her lips. "I fancy if the old lady had lived a few days longer we should have seen a difference, for they had a terrible quarrel about money the very day she died."

"Oh! Barthomolew, you must be mistaken!"

"No! I ain't, Miss Eudora. I've got ears as well as my betters; and I was in the dressing-room, mending and patching, that afternoon when Mr Deane came in and asked the old lady for money, and she told him she'd cut him straight out of her will. And so she would have done, and that's my belief, if she hadn't been cut off, poor old soul, in that awful sudden way herself."



"She has remembered you and cook, I hope, Barthomolew," said Eudora, wishing to change the subject.

"Well, yes ! miss. There was fifty pounds a-piece for us, if that can be called a remembrance for twenty years' hard service. However, such as it is, we've got it, and the sooner we're out of the old place the better."

"You are not going to remain with Mr Deane then ?"

"Lor' bless you ! no, miss—and do you suppose he'd keep us, if we wished it ever so ? Why ! there'll hardly be one stone left upon another of the old house in three months' time ! Mr Deane, he went off to London yesterday (as, of course, you know, miss), and all the old furniture is to be sold straight away, and the manor to be painted, and papered, and refurnished, from garret to basement. And new servants,

guess, there'll be a new mistress into the bargain, and I don't feel like being under a young girl, at my time of life, Miss Eudora."

Eudora coloured, but did not reply. She believed she knew for whom all the alterations and improvements were to be made, but was too happy and too proud to confide in a servant. So, again, she changed the subject.

"I suspected something of the sort would happen, Barthomolew; and Mr Overton told me to come over and collect my own belongings. They are not many, I know. I was never burthened with riches," she added, with a careless laugh, "but such as they are, I may as well have them sent down to the parsonage, where I am to remain for, at least, the next few months."

"Well, Miss Eudora, there are your

winter things in the wardrobe, you know, and your books and work-box, and your canary, if you care to take the poor thing."

"Oh, yes! I particularly want my canary," said Eudora, as she ascended the staircase with the old servant. How familiar and yet how strange everything appeared. The hush of death was removed from the old building, and yet it was so still; it seemed as if no life reigned there. Only the canary, who understood nothing, and therefore feared nothing, trilled forth his careless lay from the window of the room which had been Eudora Thane's. As the girl paused on the upper landing, opposite the apartment in which Mrs Griffin had died, she slightly shuddered.

"Have you dismantled *that* room yet, Barthomolew?"

"No, miss! though it's Mr Deane's orders as it's to be cleared out the very

glad when they carry all those faded old trimmings out of the house. How dreadful she looked under them the day she died, miss—didn't she?"

"Yes," said Eudora, with a sigh, as she passed to her own room. Here, the task of collection was an easy one. The servant assisted her to pack her few possessions in a box, and promised to send it after her to the parsonage. As Eudora was putting the last trifles together, Barthomolew discovered that the box would require a cord, and went down to the kitchen to search for one. She had scarcely disappeared when the girl found that her work-basket was missing. She did not wish to part with it, for it was a present from Edgar; the only gift, indeed, that he had ever made her: a surprise with which he had charmed her heart one day on

his return from Walshott. She remembered that she had been working in the dining-room on the evening of Mrs Griffin's death, and tried to recall where she had last placed the basket. Suddenly the truth flashed upon her. Something in it had been required during the old lady's fatal illness, and she had carried it into the sick-room.

Barthomolew had said that nothing had been touched there, consequently her work-basket must be where she had left it. A thrill of something akin to horror ran through Eudora's veins as she contemplated seeking it, but she was a brave girl, and not given to indulge in sickly, imaginative fears. So she walked steadily from her own room to that which had been occupied by the late Mrs Griffin. As she closed the door behind her, her breath came somewhat faster, but not because there was anything grim or ghostly-looking in the apartment.

owner. The windows were thrown wide to the sweet spring air; the bed was stripped and open; the army of physic bottles had been carried away by the doctors; and the room smelt fresh and wholesome. Nothing else had been touched or removed, however. The faded hangings still adorned the bedstead and windows, and sundry articles were lying in confusion about the floor and tables.

As Barthomolew had told her, this was the room which Edgar Deane had given orders should be first dismantled, therefore the servants had not considered it worth their while to trouble their heads about setting it in order. Eudora soon spied her work-basket on a chest of drawers, and sprang forward to reclaim it. As she did so, she perceived that its contents had been upset. Her scissors lay on the dressing-table; a

reel of cotton rolled from under her feet. She found it necessary to sit down and examine how many of her small possessions were missing or not. Her search resulted in the discovery that her silver thimble was gone, which was rather a serious loss to Eudora in those days. So she looked all round the room for it, and not being successful, went down on her knees to search under the low old-fashioned bedstead. The dust and dirt which was concealed behind the faded valance made it difficult at first to see anything, but after a while several small articles came to view. First and foremost the missing thimble, then a mouldy biscuit, and the top of a broken gallipot; lastly, something smooth and round, which Eudora drew to the light with a smile of melancholy remembrance, and then suddenly regarded with a look of ineffable horror. She seized it with a vehemence,

grasped some poisonous adder. She ran with it to the open window, and wiped the dust from its surface, and examined it carefully on all sides. As she did so, the girl's cheek blanched to an ashy pallor, and her eyes dilated beneath the influence of her feelings. She stood with what she had found clasped in her hand, and the thoughts that agitated her soul revealing themselves by a palpitating bosom and a look of stony despair. She hardly knew, as she stood there, if she were alive or dead ; she seemed to have passed into another world than this ; whilst little thoughts, little remembrances, little words, came trooping back upon her mind, and forming themselves into a formidable phalanx of facts that refused to be reasoned or argued back into uncertainty. Eudora could not tell for

how long she had been smitten thus—turned into stone by the horror of her discovery ; but the first sound that recalled her to herself was the voice of Barthomolew at the open door.

"Lor! miss! I've been looking for you everywhere; and who ever would have dreamed of finding you in this room. But what's the matter? Are you ill?"

"No! no!" cried Eudora, suddenly, as she thrust what she held in her hand into her bosom; "indeed I am not ill, but this room, and my thoughts!—Barthomolew, they have been too much for me!" and thereupon she began to cry hysterically, and rocked herself backward and forward.

"In course, my dear, and whatever made you come here, I can't think. I haven't been nigh the place myself since she was carried into the lower rooms for the inquest, and didn't mean to, either,

She's dead and gone, and no tears can't bring her back. It's the living we must think on, my dear, and not the dead."

"Oh! yes! Oh! yes! I know that, and I do—I *do*," cried Eudora, amidst her sobs; "but I wish that I was dead myself—I wish that I was dead, and could remember nothing."

"Lor'! miss! that's quite unnatural, and only comes of your shutting yourself up in this gloomy old room! Now, do give over, there's a dear. What would Mr Deane think if he came home and found you like this?"

"He's not coming, is he?" exclaimed Eudora, glancing round, with a look of alarm.

"Not as I know of, but he didn't tell us anything of his comings or goings."

"I must return to the parsonage at once," said the girl suddenly, starting to

her feet. "I have been here too long already."

"Have a glass of wine and a biscuit before you start, miss. It's a long tramp across them fields, and you're all of a tremble. I know there's a bottle of the poor old lady's sherry left in the sideboard."

"No! no! I couldn't touch it—I wouldn't touch it to save my life," replied Eudora, incoherently, as she stumbled down the stairs again, and passed out, half blinded, into the sun-lighted fields.

As she walked on, fast and determinately, she seemed at first to be endued with a supernatural strength, like that which has supported martyrs to the stake. But when she found herself alone—surrounded only by the sweet, soul-appealing signs of nature; by the spring verdure, the tender herbs, the nestling birds, Eudora's courage gave way, and sinking down upon the

first it was nothing but horror, disgust, and dismay—feelings that made her long to fly from Holyoak and every one she had ever known there. But presently a soft, womanly compassion stirred her heart, clothing her harsher sentiments with a mantle of pity—and the question arose, if *she* deserted Edgar, who would be his friend?

She pictured him, sinking into a loveless, self-reproachful old age, torn to pieces with the agonies of remorse, yet not daring to make a confidant of any human creature—without any pleasure in his wealth—alone—unsympathised with, and unloved. And then she saw herself by his side—stealing her hand into his own—looking at him with her faithful eyes, and whispering that there is hope of heaven even for the most guilty.

"How could I have ever dreamt of deserting him," thought Eudora, as she raised herself, and wiped her streaming eyes. "I, who ought to be proud to think that I have been called to the high and blessed task of living to comfort one of the most unhappy of God's children. For he *must* be unhappy. I know it and feel it—and he will be unhappy for the remainder of his life—my poor, misguided Edgar! But this is the time to prove the sincerity of my love for him, and it shall. From this moment I will dedicate my life and all its powers to his consolation, so that he may never sink into that worst of all sins—despair of the goodness of heaven."

She arose from her recumbent position as she made this resolution, and lifted her pure, womanly eyes to the sky above her. There was the courage of a martyr in

there many martyrs and many saints in our midst every day, although we pass them by, and never recognise them as such.

Mr Overton was struck by the change that had passed over Eudora's countenance, when she entered his study that afternoon. He could not define what it was, but there was no possibility of ignoring its existence. She looked like one who had stood face to face with the shadow of death, and was not yet reconciled to the fact that she still existed in a lower world. And, added to this, she wore an expression of determination and impenetrability that sat very strangely on her features.

"I am afraid you are making yourself too anxious about this matter, Eudora,"

he said, as she approached him, "therefore, the sooner we get over it the better."

"About my father's feelings concerning me?" she answered, with a wintry smile. "Oh, no! Mr Overton, I am quite aware he doesn't care for me, and am prepared to hear anything."

"I am not so sure of that," was the minister's reply; "and I wish Mr Thane had deputed anyone but myself to relate the story to you. However, I have already told you that it is both a painful and an unworthy one. In the first place, then, my dear child, you have never known your father under his real name. He has no more right to that of Thane than you have."

"What is his name, then?" she demanded, with surprise.

"That is what he still forbids me to

a peer of the realm; and he is married to a woman of high birth and title."

Eudora was no simpleton. She had been reared in a homely atmosphere, but she had read largely, and listened more, and was not entirely ignorant of the laws that rule the world into which she had never entered.

"If my father is a peer, I must also be a woman of title," she answered quickly.

But Mr Overton did not accede to her proposition. On the contrary, he looked still more uneasy.

"No! dear Eudora," he said, after a pause, "you are not! No one will love you less, nor think the less of you for it, but you have no claim to any title whatever."

She did not yet grasp the truth of his statement.

"But how can that be, Mr Overton? I thought the daughters of peers were always called Lady Mary or Lady Margaret, or whatever their names may be."

"So they are, my dear, when their fathers are married to their mothers."

"Then why should I be an exception to the rule?"

"Cannot you guess, Eudora? Think a little. Why should your father, who is by rights an earl, call himself Mr Thane when he comes to visit you—why should he have been ashamed to own you for all these years, and paid Mrs Griffin an annuity for keeping you down at Holyoak? Why is it impossible that he should take you to his home, now that you are left without a protector, and introduce you to his wife and his wife's friends?"

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“Child! will you force me to tell the whole story to you—cannot you help me a little with your own suspicions? Oh! it is in such moments as these,” exclaimed Mr Overton, as he hid his face in his hands, “that one sees with clear eyes the wickedness and enormity of sin!”

“He didn’t *kill* my mother!” cried Eudora, with sudden horror.

“No, no! my dear. What put such an idea into your head? But he did what is almost as bad—he ruined her! Your father was never married to your mother, Eudora. He can never own you before the world as his daughter.”

The girl sprung to her feet, a sudden passion kindling in her eye, and making every nerve of her slight body tremble.

“*He ruined her!*” she repeated, vehe-

mently; "he ruined my poor mother, and she died—she died of the broken heart he gave her, and left me to battle with the world alone! I see it all now. She could not live, poor mother, under the burden of shame he laid upon her, and he—he is not man enough to acknowledge the wrong he has done us both, but divides himself, even by his name, from the evil of which he alone is the author. Oh! Mr Overton, I have never dreamt of so much misery as this."

"My poor child, I was afraid it would come upon you very unawares. I cannot defend your father's conduct, Eudora, but I see the difficulties in his path. To have acknowledged your claim upon him more openly, would only have been to degrade himself without doing you any good. I suppose he did what seemed to him the best thing to do, in leaving you under the guardianship of Mrs Griffin."

eyes, by trying to make excuses for my father's conduct. *My father!* I will never call him by that name again! A father must mean something more than the man who ruins a woman's life, and leaves his child without a name to the cold mercies of the world. Let us call him '*Mr Thane*' when we have occasion to mention him in the future. It is the name that he has chosen for himself, and as false as his own heart."

"Eudora! this revelation has made you bitter."

"Why should you have expected it to do anything else, Mr Overton? For years I have longed and entreated to be told the truth about myself. I knew that something was wrong: that I was not treated as other children are, and that there was a mystery to be divulged. But I never suspected this

—that I was nothing—nobody—that I had not even a name that I might call my own ! And Mr Thane, meanwhile, I suppose, lives at ease in some grand place suited to his title and dignity, honoured and respected by all who know him, trusted and believed in by his wife, whilst my mother rots in her unknown grave, and I—"

But here Eudora's attempted bravado broke down, and she sobbed without restraint, whilst she hid her face upon her outstretched arms.

"Eudora—dear child ! do not give way like this ! the sin is not yours, my dear, and no one with a human heart would think of visiting it upon your head. You must try and not cherish such revengeful feelings against your father, for I believe him to be really sorry for what is past, and anxious, as far as in him lies, to remedy the evil he has done."

mother from the grave, or give me the name I should have claimed as a right? Don't speak of him to me any more, Mr Overton! he is not my father, and henceforward, I will never acknowledge him as such."

"You will speak more reasonably, my dear, when you have given yourself time to think calmly over the matter. It would not only be wrong, but foolish, to adhere to so hastily formed a resolution; for now, perhaps, more than at any other portion of your life, will you need Mr Thane's protection and assistance."

"I need neither, and I refuse both!" exclaimed Eudora. "Thank heaven! I have the promise of a protection that will make me independent of Mr Thane for the future."

"Are you alluding to Edgar Deane?" asked Mr Overton abruptly.

Eudora coloured. She had alluded to her lover, of course, but it was embarrassing to have to confess it. Yet this was a juncture when it seemed to behove her to be perfectly candid.

"Yes," she answered, firmly, "I *did* allude to him. He gave me to understand, some time before Mrs Griffin's death, that he loved me, and only waited an opportunity to marry me; and I am sure that he will not depart from his promise now. So I am provided for, you see, Mr Overton, and have no need to trouble Mr Thane on my behalf again."

Mr Overton regarded the bright eyes and burning cheeks that confronted him across the study table with the utmost compassion."

"My poor child," he said, "this world

those who trust in them.”

“What do you mean? Has Edgar written to you?”

“No, he has not written, but I have seen and spoken with him, Eudora. Mr Thane being puzzled to know what best to do for you at this crisis, it was but natural I should mention to him the understanding that I could not help seeing has existed between you and Mr Deane. And your father, being anxious to secure your happiness, deputed me as a sort of semi-guardian of yours, to sound the young man upon the subject, and I regret to say that Mr Deane did not come out of the interview with flying colours.”

“What did he say?” demanded the girl, with dry lips.

“Well, he said very little, but that little

was to the purpose. He has evidently no intention of marrying you, Eudora. You had better hear the bitter truth at once, my child. Either you have mistaken his meaning, or his sudden accession to wealth has caused him to alter his views on the subject. Anyway, he told me plainly he had no idea of marrying you, or even being engaged to you, and that you had never been more than friends to one another."

"Edgar said *that?*" she interposed, in the same quiet manner.

"Yes; and more besides. I will tell you everything, Eudora, not to wound your poor heart unnecessarily, but that your cure may be the sooner and more easily accomplished. It was incumbent on me, during such a conversation, to inform Mr Deane of the circumstances of your birth, and he told me that, if he had

tion to his putting them into execution ; for that, with his altered circumstances and position, it would behove him to be very careful whom he selected as mistress of the manor house

“Edgar said *that*,” repeated Eudora, huskily ; “he mentioned his altered circumstances and position ?”

“He did indeed, my dear ! Do you think for a moment that I would deceive you ?”

“No, no !” with her hand to her head ; “but it is so hard—so very hard—to believe.”

She did not cry, nor go into a fury of passion, as she had done when her father’s treachery and her own shame had been revealed to her. *That* had come as a fearful blow to her—but *this* was a death stroke.

She stood by the table—white and still as a statue of marble—whilst the whole scene of Mrs Griffin's death and Edgar's despondency passed rapidly before her view. Once or twice her hand went up (irrelevantly, as it seemed) to the bosom of her dress, and her fingers pressed against a substance that lay concealed within it; whilst she thought of her silent agony in the field, and the vow she had registered to be this man's comforter and solace if her own life were sacrificed to the duty. And with this, a mighty contempt, disgust, and loathing, took the place of the love she had borne to Edgar Deane, and however much the uprooting of that misplaced affection might cost her, it would never reign paramount in Eudora Thane's heart again. When the struggle was over, and she raised her eyes once more to Mr Overton's face, he was shocked to see the suffering depicted there.

thought possible. But you must be brave, Eudora, and pluck the feeling up by the roots. It is unworthy of you as he is. I never liked him, and, at this moment, I think he is the most contemptible cur that ever breathed. He can never have really cared for you. All he loves are his riches. Be brave, and do not let him have the satisfaction of seeing he has marred your life."

"I am brave, Mr Overton! It was a wrench, but it is over. And Mr Deane will never, I hope, even have the satisfaction of seeing me again, for I shall leave Holyoak before he returns to it."

"You cannot do that, Eudora, your father has placed you here, and you have no other home to go to. Besides, it is your duty to remain with the guardians whom he may select."

"Mr Overton, I have already asked you not to call Mr Thane my father. I suppose he is so, but I cannot feel it, and I do not consider that I owe him any more duty than he has shown towards me. He has made me an outcast! I will be one. I would rather beg my bread from door to door, than owe another crust to his bounty."

"What would you do, my dear?"

"I will earn my own living as other women do, and be independent of everybody but myself. I have a friend who has offered to help me, and I shall go to her. I would rather be a servant, than live as I have lived hitherto."

"Mr Thane anticipated some such resolution on your part, Eudora, and told me that, in the event of your marriage, or your wishing to pursue any occupation on your own account, he should place five hundred pounds to your credit with the

It will start you comfortably in life, and render your path comparatively an easy one. But you must not decide in a hurry, Eudora; nor adopt any profession without the advice of your friends."

The girl's eyes literally blazed with fury.

"Mr Overton, you no more understand what I am feeling than this table does! Is it possible you can believe I would accept money from the man who refuses me my natural rights as a child? A liberal offer! yes! indeed, very liberal! An offer that is to rid him of me, henceforward, and permit him to forget that he is a coward and a seducer. But I will not even give him the satisfaction of thinking he has provided for me. Tell him that I refuse his money, the price of my mother's honour—that I threw it back in his face,

and that I will go out into the world what he has made me—a pariah, without claim on his affection, his money, or his name."

She turned from him, and was about to leave the room, when Mr Overton detained her.

"One word, Eudora! Promise me you will not quit Holyoak without giving me notice of your departure."

He had taken her hand as he spoke, but she wrenched it from him, as though fearful of giving way to her feelings.

"Yes! I will promise you so far," she answered, as the door closed after her.

"How the news has hardened her," he thought, as she disappeared. "When have I ever seen such a conflict of passion depicted in her young face before? Poor child! to lose both father and lover in one day! It is enough to turn her heart

that usually follow the indulgence of their passions, with what horror would they shrink from the first temptation to sin ! ”





CHAPTER VIII.

“LET ME BE FORGOTTEN.”

MRS GEROME was beginning to be exceedingly weary of Holyoak, and impatient to find herself back in London. She had had her own reasons (as she informed Eudora) for burying herself for awhile in that very sequestered and unknown hamlet, but she was quite excited at the idea that her enforced banishment was coming to an end. It was not only that the person on whom all her hopes were fixed ; to whom every

it), was the master of every feeling of her heart, lived in London, and she was miserable away from him ; but her active mind had begun to loathe the inactivity by which she was surrounded. The chickens, and buttercups and daisies had commenced to pall upon her. They were delightful at first, like clotted cream, but she had made them her daily food, and her jaded appetite demanded something more piquant and exciting. It is invariably the case with the votaries of the stage.

Whilst they are in the flush of work, their thoughts wander away from the flaring footlights, and the heated dressing-rooms, to purling streams and flower-besprinkled meadows ; they dream of the pleasures of the country, and declare their idea of Paradise to be that of a place where

no sight nor sound shall ever reach them, but such as are produced by nature. And the first holiday they obtain, they rush away to the green fields, and fall into raptures over pigs, and cows, and poultry. But it does not last ! There is a fascination in the footlights, which cannot be extracted from any other inanimate object. The true artist is not satisfied with receiving ; he must *give*, in order to be happy ; and when he is past giving himself, he finds his best pleasure in watching the efforts of those who fill the place he has vacated.

It is a known fact that whenever a company of hard-worked artists have an "off" night, they spend it, not in the seclusion of home, but in the stalls of somebody else's theatre. Mrs Gerome had been unusually heart-sick when she had chosen Holyoak as her temporary residence.

the identity of the person she loved best in the world, and she had allowed herself to be beaten from the field. It was the reaction, after many years of courageous warfare, and valiant attempts for victory. But the old energy was coming back to her now, and she was impatient to find herself once more upon the trail.

She had found some diversion from her own troubles in the company of Eudora Thane, and had felt great interest in the young girl, especially since the last interview they had held together. But since Mrs Griffin's death, Mrs Gerome had neither seen nor heard from Eudora, although she had written a note to her, containing the usual polite falsehood demanded of us by society, expressive of her sympathy, condolence and regret.

So Mrs Gerome concluded, rather hastily,

that Eudora's altered circumstances would put an end to their intercourse, and the idea made her all the more impatient to leave Holyoak, and get back to London. She supposed that Mrs Griffin's death had improved Eudora's prospects, or that Mr Deane had seized the opportunity to declare his intentions regarding her, or that Mr Thane had decided to take his daughter home. Any way, the girl had neither written to nor visited her ; and Mrs Gerome had even ordered her factotum, Mrs Squires, to pack her wardrobe, in anticipation of a speedy removal.

So the large theatrical baskets, lined with oilskin, were brought down into the little sitting-room, which they blocked up, to the exclusion of anything else, whilst the maid re-arranged and packed their contents, and the mistress looked on with beaming eyes, anticipatory of the moment when they

Mrs Hannah Squires, as has been already mentioned, was an oddity. In the first place, she was the most faithful of servants, who would no more have allowed a word to be said against her mistress than against herself. There were plenty of people ready to say plenty of words against Mrs Gerome, who was just that sort of lively, outspoken woman who gets most scandalised in this near-sighted world, but none were found hardy enough to do so in the presence of Mrs Squires. She was devoted to the interests of her mistress, whom she looked upon as the most talented and ill-used lady in the world, and, in like proportion, she hated the man she was compelled to call her master. Hannah Squires was not unlike Mrs Gerome in personal appearance, that is to say, she was tall and dark, but

her face, though intelligent, lacked all the vivacity and archness of the actress's. Still, at a distance, or in a bad light, and especially as the maid did all she could to favour the likeness, by dressing in close imitation of her mistress, there was a considerable resemblance between the two, of which Mrs Squires was inordinately proud. Indeed, there was nothing pleased her more than to be mistaken for Mrs Gerome, however unfavourable the circumstances might be—and her weakness on this point was well-known to the lady, who laughed at her heartily for it.

"Monkeys copy their masters, Hannah," she would exclaim, when Mrs Squires appeared in a dress the facsimile of her own. "Well, I suppose I ought to accept your imitation as the sincerest flattery, but if you think you look a bit like me, you are vastly mistaken."

“Presume! you old hyprocrite! you would presume anything, if you thought you would succeed. You would go on the stage to-morrow, and attempt one of my best parts, if you didn’t know you’d get a cabbage at your head the first time you opened your mouth.” And here both mistress and maid would laugh with equal heartiness at the absurd picture the actress had conjured up.

All the same, the devotion shown to her by Hannah Squires was fully appreciated by Mrs Gerome, who often said, and with sincerity, that she did not know how she should have weathered the storms of her married life without the sympathy and assistance of her maid. So the two women were true friends, although they never forgot the difference that existed between their stations in life.

On the very afternoon that Eudora Thane held that distressing interview in Mr Overton's study, Mrs Gerome and her servant were busy with the theatrical baskets, the contents of which were strewn all over the room.

"All those things on the sofa are to go to the dyer's," said Mrs Gerome, "and you had better pack them at once, and address them, and then they'll be out of the way. Get a pencil and paper, Hannah, and take down my directions. Roman gold, to be cleaned; white satin, dyed crimson; black silk, re-dyed and watered."

"Do you think it is worth it, ma'am?" inquired Mrs Squires, as she held up the black silk, disparagingly.

"Of course it is, or I should not have said so. I know what you're driving at, Hannah. You want that black silk for yourself, but you won't get it, not till I've

made up as a petticoat to the black velvet, so take your evil eye off it, and go on with my directions."

The servant looked at her mistress with adoring admiration, and took up her pencil again.

"Lisle lace scarf, to be cleaned; ditto, orange satin train. What about that violet velvet bodice, Hannah? Do you think they can raise the pile a second time?"

"I don't know, I'm sure, ma'am; but I'm afraid you couldn't wear it if they did. You've grown a deal stouter since you've been here."

"*A deal stouter!*" cried Mrs Gerome, as she leapt on a chair to regard herself in the mirror. "Heavens! woman! what do you mean? Do you wish to kill all my hopes at a blow. *A deal stouter!* and when I've

just signed an agreement to play in high comedy for the next six months. Go and fetch me a carving knife, that I may send you out of a world which you contaminate with your falsehoods."

The maid chuckled to herself with delight at this ebullition.

"Well! you know, ma'am, country air and quiet *will* do it; and you've been eating a lot of eggs, and cream, and such like, since you've been in Holyoak."

Mrs Gerome descended from her pedestal and stalked solemnly up to the servant's side.

"*Who* bought me these eggs and that cream?" she demanded, in a tragic voice. "Who is it that has made milk puddings and buttered toast for me every day of my life since I have been here? Hannah Squires, I see through your hellish design! You thought, perhaps, that your evil in-

suspected and unblamed; that you would even present yourself to that London manager, and step into my engagement, without his discovering the difference between us, whilst I—your injured and innocent victim—lay a bloated body in Holyoak, unable to stir thence, or assert her rights, by reason of too much eggs and cream. But you have betrayed yourself—in those three words, ‘eggs and cream.’ Your wickedness has unintentionally been laid bare, and the avenging hand of justice shall swoop down upon you like a bird of prey. By this simple means,” cried Mrs Gerome, seizing hold of a chair, “will I scatter on the carpet those brains which — Heavens!” she continued, as she brought the chair down upon the floor again with a bang,

"here is Eudora Thane come to see me at last."

Poor Eudora, as she entered the room, fresh from her interview with Mr Overton, looked anything but in unison with the comic element of the scene. Her misery rendered her even incapable of speech. She could only throw herself into Mrs Gerome's arms, and hide her face upon her shoulder. But the actress understood the situation, and was serious in a moment.

"My dear girl!" she exclaimed, as she pressed Eudora in a warm embrace, "I am so glad that you have come to me. I have been expecting to see you for days past. Hannah, please to collect your belongings and betake yourself to the kitchen and the beetles. I must speak to this young lady alone."

And then, when the servant had withdrawn, Mrs Gerome soon thrust the roman

drawing the sobbing girl to her side, sat down and drew her head upon her bosom, as though she had been the mother whom Eudora mourned. It was not long before she had heard the whole story, at least that part of it that related to Eudora's birth and parentage, for, with respect to Edgar Deane, the girl never opened her lips.

"And so," she concluded, "I have no father, you see, Mrs Gerome—no friends—no home. I am an outcast and a stray—something to be laughed at or pitied, I suppose, according to the humour of the hearer ; but never to be respected, or,"—with a deep sigh—"I suppose, loved."

"You wrong yourself and others, my dear, in saying so. There is no reason why you should not be loved and honoured



for your own sake all through life—far more so than the man who has brought you to such a plight."

"But are you not very much shocked and surprised to hear it?" demanded Eudora.

"I *am* shocked, my dear, for fear of the consequences it may entail on yourself, but I cannot say I am surprised, for I guessed as much from what you told me of your father the other day. I have seen more of the world's hard selfishness than you have, Eudora, and I divined the motive Mr Thane had in not acknowledging you as his daughter before the world. For you are a daughter, my dear, of whom any man might be proud, and your father must be a cold-hearted craven to be afraid to own you."

"Oh! he is a peer of the realm," returned Eudora, sarcastically. "How could

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“That’s a brave girl!” cried Mrs Gerome.
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But Mrs Gerome had, for the moment, forgotten the offer she had made to place the girl upon the stage.

"What do you want to do, my dear?" she asked.

"To work," answered Eudora; "at anything, as anything, so long as I can earn sufficient money to keep myself from starving. You said the other day," she added, more timidly, "that if you had my father's consent you would bring me out upon the stage. Perhaps you did not really mean it. I have sometimes thought since it was impossible you should—but if I am not fit for that, which seems but likely, there may be something else to which you could help me. I will accept even the place of a servant with gratitude, so that it sets me free."

The actress's speaking face assumed a look of deliberation.

the way of your adopting the profession ? It will not do to begin, and then draw back, you know."

"Mrs Gerome ! I have no friends, none, that is to say, but Mr Overton and his daughters, and they have no right to control my actions."

"And will no one else object, Eudora ?" inquired Mrs Gerome, significantly.

The girl guessed to whom she alluded, but she answered firmly.

"No one."

"Was I mistaken, then, my dear, when I affirmed that the old manor house held a particular attraction for you ?"

"You were mistaken," she replied, with trembling lips.

"I am very glad of it," said Mrs Gerome heartily ; "though I am surprised to hear you

say so, for I am not used to be mistaken. However, as I told you, Mr Deane is not a favourite of mine, and I am sure he would not have made you happy. But when I heard that the old lady was dead, and he had come into his fortune, I confess I was afraid he might speak to you on the subject of marriage, and that you might not be able to resist the combined temptations of his handsome person and the manor house."

"He has *not* spoken to me—there is nothing between us. We shall probably never meet in this world again," replied Eudora ; "and I do not wish it," she added, with a firmness of which she had not believed herself capable.

"Come, then ! that is all right," said Mrs Gerome, cheerfully ; "and now we shall see our way straight. I could hardly carry you off from Holyoak against the consent of all your friends, Eudora ; but Mr Deane and

over Mr Overton, and the thing will be done."

"But what can I do? I will not be a burden upon you," cried Eudora.

"My dear, you shall not be; because I know you would be miserable if you were. I recognise my own spirit in you, and I respect it."

At this juncture, the actress came closer to Eudora's side, and took her hand. Her whole face changed. The archness, which was so seldom absent, died out of it, and was replaced by a tender look, that made her features doubly attractive.

"My dear!" she said, almost in a whisper. "I am not a poor woman, as far as worldly riches go, but in other respects I am very poor indeed. I had a child once, Eudora—a little girl—Come now! I will not speak of her, or you will wonder how, after a period

of ten years, a woman can make so great a fool of herself over the remembrance of an infant that perished at a few months old. But what I would say is, that I have money enough for both of us, and it would give me the greatest pleasure to give you that place in my heart and home that my own daughter would have occupied. You know that I have always liked you, Eudora. I may say that I have *loved* you. I feel at this moment that I do. Come, then, and be my child—and you shall never want a home whilst I have one."

"And you will teach me to earn my own living, as soon as ever you can?" pleaded Eudora.

Mrs Gerome's merry laugh broke out again.

"How independent we are, child! I see plainly you will never put it in my power to revile you for owing me a single penny. Well, then, it shall be so. Listen to me,

contract, binding me for the next six months to play in London, and Squires and I were packing our possessions to proceed there at once. I intended on arrival to hire another servant to do the housework and cooking, as I must have a personal attendant at the theatre. But Mrs Squires does not like theatre work, and much prefers no interference in her household arrangements. Will it be beneath your dignity to do what my own daughter might have done, had Heaven spared her to me ? that is, will you be my companion, in the theatre and out of it, and thus spare me the expense of a second servant ? I put it plainly before you, my child, but you are too much of a gentlewoman to misunderstand me. It is the only way in which I *can* put it, in order to make you feel that you will not be a recipient of my bounty."

"Dear Mrs Gerome," said Eudora, warmly, "I shall be grateful to serve you upon any terms."

"We shall not be idle, meanwhile, my dear, for I shall begin to give you lessons at once; and as soon as I can put you on the stage, I shall. You have yet to learn the secrets of the prison house, Eudora, and you will find that I possess great power to introduce a pupil of mine to the profession. Only, don't set your heart on it, child, but use it as it uses you. It may be the means of bringing you a competency for life, but it will never fill up one void in your domestic life. The worst of disappointments attend those who regard the stage, or any other profession, as a means of doing more than make them forget the troubles they must inevitably encounter in going through the world."

The actress's head drooped; her eyes

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“How can I ever thank you sufficiently?” cried Eudora, in a confused manner; “I cannot now! my head is burning, and I do not feel able to think; but another time I may, when—when—I don’t feel quite so ill.”

“My child! I cannot let you go home like this. Your eyes are too bright, Eudora, and your hands too hot. If you do not take care of yourself, you will be ill.”

“Take me away from Holyoak, then,” cried the girl, passionately; “let me never see this place again, or I shall die.”

Mrs Gerome had guessed a great deal more than Eudora had chosen to confide in her, and her face grew grave and earnest, as she felt that, if she wished to save this girl from herself, she must act with determination, and at once.

"I *will* take you away, my dear," she answered; "and this very night, if it is necessary. I will return with you to the parsonage, and speak to Mr Overton about it at once."

Then she opened the parlour door, and called to Mrs Squires to bring her cloak and bonnet, and attired herself in them, then and there.

"Hannah," she said, "I am going to walk back with Miss Thane to the parsonage, and perhaps I shall return with her to London to-night. Don't stare like an owl! I suppose you'll insinuate I don't know my own business next. Pack up the black bag with what I may require till to-morrow, when you will follow me with the rest of the baggage—and have some tea ready for us on our return. Come! Eudora!" and, without further explanation, Mrs Gerome took her young

THE PRESENCE OF MR. GEROME.

The minister was not surprised to see them together. He knew that Mrs Gerome was the friend to whom Eudora had alluded during her conversation with himself, and had watched the girl taking her way to her house. And when Mrs Gerome explained that Eudora had consented to accept the office of her companion, and was anxious to enter on her duties at once, the good man had no valid objection to make to the proposal, because he had no authority to raise one.

"Has Miss Thane told you, madam," he urged feebly, for lack of something better to urge, "that she is not left in a condition to compel her to accept any service as a means of livelihood? Her father, foreseeing that she might prefer to make her own way in the world, has offered to



place five hundred pounds to her credit, which would be sufficient to keep her for some time to come, until she had thoroughly weighed the advantages and disadvantages of an independent livelihood. And I am convinced that should she at any time feel a disinclination for work, Mr Thane is the last person in the world who would permit his daughter to want for anything."

"And I have already told you, Mr Overton," said Eudora, hotly, "that I will not touch another farthing of his money—either now or in the future! Has he not humiliated me enough already? Would you have me a beggar as well as an outcast?"

"Neither of those terms shall ever be applied to you, Eudora, whilst I live to contradict them," said Mrs Gerome; "and I am sure Mr Overton understands that,

him, he has no power to do more than try and dissuade you from carrying them into execution."

"I have no wish even to do that," replied the minister, sadly. "Eudora knows that I have ever had her happiness and well-being at heart."

"Indeed—indeed, you have, dear Mr Overton," said the girl. "You have been my best and truest friend, and I am most grateful for your kindness—only—don't oppose my desire to leave Holyoak. Let me go away with Mrs Gerome, I entreat of you, or I shall go out of my mind."

She flung herself sobbing at his knee, and the minister's hand was laid affectionately on her stricken head.

"My poor, dear child," he said. "Yes !

I am sure it is best for you to go—at all events for the present, and so, as this lady is kind enough to offer to take you, let us arrange it so—only—you will agree to my acquainting Mr Thane with your determination. In justice to him, I must do it."

"Oh! no! Oh! no! What justice does he claim from my hands? What justice has he shown to me? He is the last person I should wish to know it! I want to be dead to him from this day forward."

"There you are wrong, my dear," interposed Mrs Gerome, quickly. "You may not feel much respect for Mr Thane, but he appears to have done his duty by you hitherto, and you have no right to deprive him of the possibility of making you all the reparation in his power."

Overton. "Mr Thane has been guilty of great weakness, but he has not a bad heart, and I am convinced he feels a sincere interest in his daughter. It would be showing ingratitude for the past not to let him have any opportunity of continuing his kindness in the future."

Eudora shuddered, but said nothing. She did not like to oppose her opinion to that of two persons who knew so much better than herself, but she felt as if she should know no security in life were she continually to be subject to the dread of a renewed intercourse with the betrayer of her mother.

Mrs Gerome guessed her thoughts. She was so quick, she guessed everything.

"What you propose is only fair, Mr Overton; but I think the ground on which Eudora and Mr Thane are to meet for the future should be decided at once. When you write to him, therefore, will you say that we shall be at Milton's Hotel, in South Kensington, for a few days, after which we shall go abroad, and be wanderers on the face of the earth. If Mr Thane is desirous, therefore, of making any new proposals for the consideration of his daughter, will he communicate with her at that address before this day week?"

"Certainly, Mrs Gerome. I will let him know what you say. And is it possible then, Eudora, that you contemplate leaving us so soon?"

"To-night—to-night, dear Mr Overton. Oh! let me go at once. Each moment

She rose from her kneeling position as she spoke, and threw her arms round the old man's neck, and kissed him, as though she had been his daughter.

“Good-bye, dear—dear friend! I shall never cease to ask God to bless you, though the sharpest wound I have ever received has come through your hands to-day. Kiss Madge and Nelly for me. I have not the heart to say good-bye to them. And promise me—you will not tell *any one* (except Mr Thane) where I have gone. Let me pass away and be forgotten, as though I lay already in my nameless grave.”

She turned from him to throw herself into the arms of Mrs Gerome, and so

“Let Me be forgotten.” 247

the two women—equally forlorn, equally hopeless, equally miserable—passed out together into the darkness of night and of the world.

END OF VOL. I.

